OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

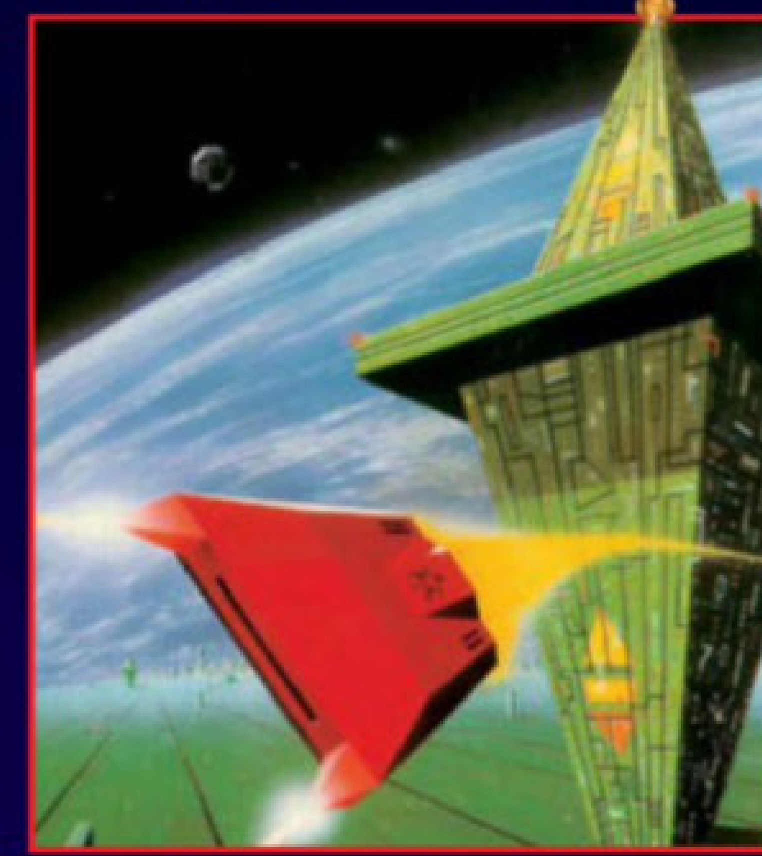
retro* GAMER



AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE

DRILLER THRILLER

HOW INCENTIVE SOFTWARE CREATED ITS GROUNDBREAKING VIDEOGAME



SYSTEM 3

MARK CALE EXPLAINS HOW THE BRITISH PUBLISHER HAS SURVIVED FOR 33 YEARS

GAMING'S BIGGEST DISASTERS

DEVELOPERS DISCUSS THE CONSOLES, PERIPHERALS AND GAMES THAT CRASHED AND BURNED DESPITE THEIR HYPE



CREATING CENTIPEDE

DONA BAILEY REVISITS HER ICONIC ARCADE BLASTER

"I LOVE THE POWER GLOVE, IT'S SO BAD"

LUCAS BARTON, THE WIZARD

ALSO INSIDE

- ALEX KIDD: HIGH-TECH WORLD
- TIME BANDIT
- KENSEIDEN
- NEC PC-98
- BLAGGER
- 720°

SUPER OFF ROAD

A GAME THAT WAS SUCH BRILLIANT FUN IVAN STEWART LENT HIS NAME TO IT

FEATURED INSIDE

PERFECTING PARASOL STARS

YOUR INDISPENSIBLE GUIDE TO TAITO'S MARVELLOUS RAINBOW ISLANDS SEQUEL

BRIAN FARGO: THE RPG KING

THE FOUNDER OF INTERPLAY ENTERTAINMENT ON HIS 30-YEAR GAMING CAREER

ip IMAGINE PUBLISHING
DigitalEdition
GreatDigitalMags.com
ISSUE 141



OUT NOW!
ONLY AT FUNSTOCK.CO.UK
FROM BEDROOMS TO BILLIONS
THE DEFINITIVE STORY OF THE UK VIDEO GAMES INDUSTRY
> JON HARE
> SENSIBLE SOFTWARE
> DAVID PERRY
> SHINY ENTERTAINMENT/ GAIKAI
> JEFF MINTER
> LLAMASOFT
> PHIL HARRISON
> MINDSCAPE / MICROSOFT
> IAN LIVINGSTONE
> FIGHTING FANTASY SERIES
> MATTHEW SMITH
> MANIC MINER
> DAVID BRABEN
> FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS
> DAVID DARLING
> CODEMASTERS
> PETER MOLYNEUX
> POPULOUS / DUNGEON KEEPER
· In-depth documentary film running at over 150 mins!
· Brand new interviews with the leading game developers and creators
· Spans the history of gaming and the industry it created
· Never seen before footage and rare archive content
· Original soundtrack composed by famous artists from the era
· 'Special Edition' includes 18 exclusive 'making of' and special features including another 150 minutes of bonus content with:
- The Making of Elite
- The Making of Manic Miner
- The Making of Populous
- The Making of Sensible Soccer
- The Making of Speedball 2
- Making music for the C64 and many, many more!
DVD FROM £14.99*
BLU-RAY FROM £19.99*
JETPAC
ULTIMATE
SINCLAIR
"THE VIDEO GAME DOCUMENTARY FOR ALL GAME LOVERS, NOT JUST THE BRITISH!" - IGN
"FROM BEDROOMS TO BILLIONS IS A CAPTIVATING AND DEFINITIVE ACCOUNT OF THEIR PIONEERING PAST" - THE SKINNY
"IF YOU ONLY BUY ONE INDIE FILM THIS YEAR, OR INDEED EVER, MAKE IT THIS ONE" - EDUGEEK
VISIT: BEDROOMSTOBILLIONS.COM TO GET YOUR COPY NOW!
AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY AT: funstock.co.uk
* PRICES SUBJECT TO CHANGE

THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE LICENSED GAME



DARRAN JONES

GoldenEye 007. A wonderful game that really felt like you were taking part in the actual movie. Even my wife would play the multiplayer with me.

Expertise:
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine

Currently playing:
Obscure

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



NICK THORPE

Treasure's *Astro Boy: Omega Factor.* It's not just a great licensed game, it's one of the best GBA games full stop.

Expertise:
Owning six Master Systems (I sold one)

Currently playing:
Kenseiden

Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog



PAUL DRURY

Climbing into the *Star Wars* cockpit cabinet in my local arcade back in 1983 was revelatory and showed that, if handled thoughtfully, a licence could bring a whole extra dimension to the gaming experience. Yahoo, kid!

Expertise:
Bailiff baiting

Currently playing:
Track & Field

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



JONATHAN WELLS

I'm going to go for *Aladdin*, great fun with a selection of different levels and smooth animation.

Expertise:
Takling dirty nappies and retro spreads

Currently playing:
Bioshock Infinite

Favourite game of all time:
Day Of The Tentacle



PAUL DAVIES

I was ridiculously – err – pumped to see Pepsi Man in *Fighting Vipers*. He looked so cool. I'm going for *McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure* for the Mega Drive, though. That was amazing.

Expertise:
Repeatedly banging my head against a brick wall

Currently playing:
Destiny

Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N' Ghosts



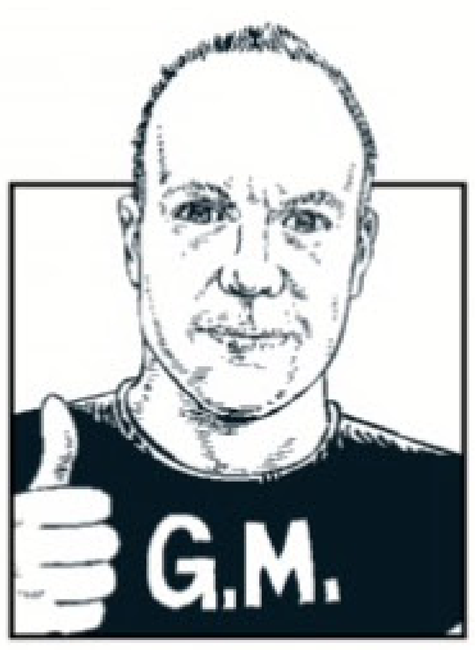
DAVID CROOKES

I really enjoyed seeing *Robocop* on the GX4000, if only because it showed some potential for this poor, ill-fated system.

Expertise:
Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, Dizzy, and PlayStation (but is that retro? Debate!)

Currently playing:
Grim Fandango

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



GRAEME MASON

Tron: Deadly Discs on the Intellivision. A great game with some fantastic sound effects.

Currently playing:
Icewind Dale

Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 4



MARTYN CARROLL

Ghostbusters. I loved the film and David Crane's game was great in its own right.

Expertise:
Sinclair computers, Spectrum software

Currently playing:
Dark Souls

Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy

LOADING...



I never used a Power Glove when they first came about, but it was glaringly obvious to see why it's such a terrible device. Everything about it screams unwieldy, from its awkward pad placement, to the numerous and unneeded buttons that adorn it. It's a complete mess of a peripheral, and about as functional as it is ugly.

I obviously knew about Nintendo's device because I'd seen it in action whilst watching *The Wizard*, but being the cynical 17-year-old that I was, I knew it was going to be crap. 24 years later and a play with the device firsthand confirmed everything the 17-year-old version of me already knew – it's crap, remarkably so in fact.

And yet I can't help but like the concept of the Power Glove. Like many of the things featured in our disasters feature, it's trying to do something a little different and that should always be commended. Not everything can be successful, and while some of the items we're featuring were arguably good (Vectrex we're looking at you) their actual timing couldn't have been more calamitous.

There's something strangely fascinating when reading about failures, and hopefully you'll be wishing that some of the featured systems did a little better. I know I was.

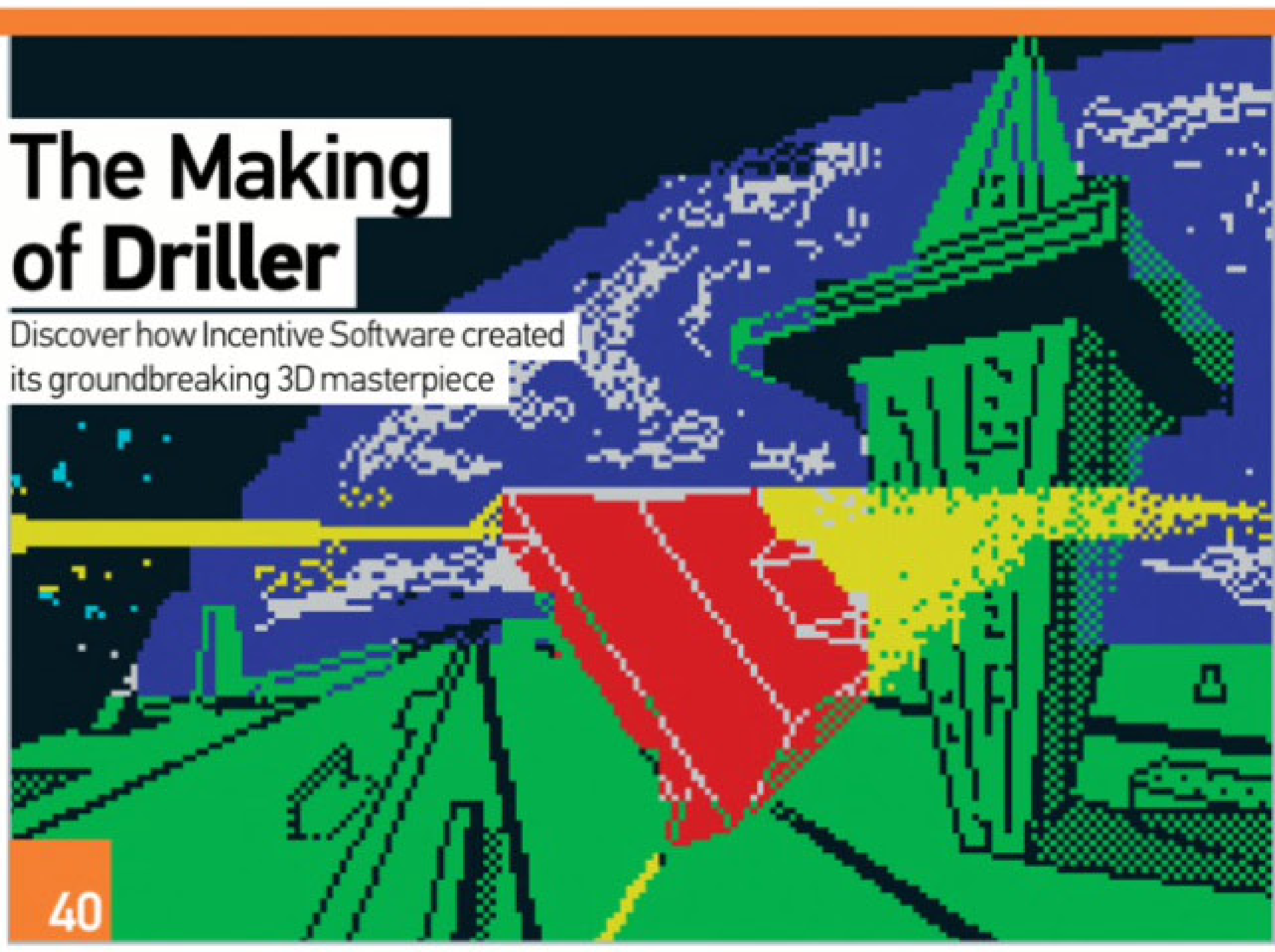
Enjoy the magazine!





CONTENTS

>> Load 141 Breathing new life into classic games









Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

SUBSCRIBE TODAY! AND SAVE 50%
It would be disastrous to miss our sub
Subscribe at **www.imaginesubs.co.uk**



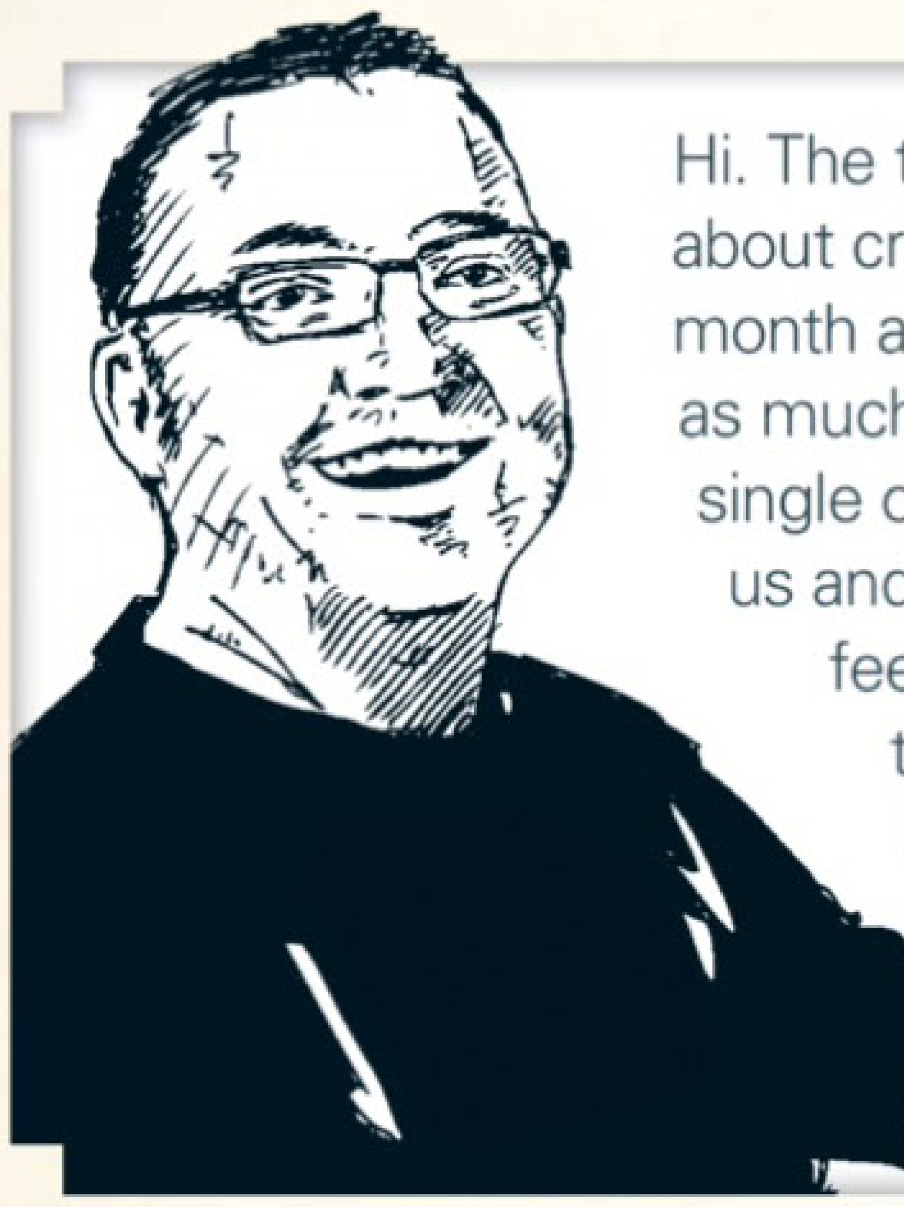
Vistit the **Retro Gamer** online shop at **imagineshop.co.uk** for back issues, books and merchandise



Join our Retro Gamer Reader Panel today!



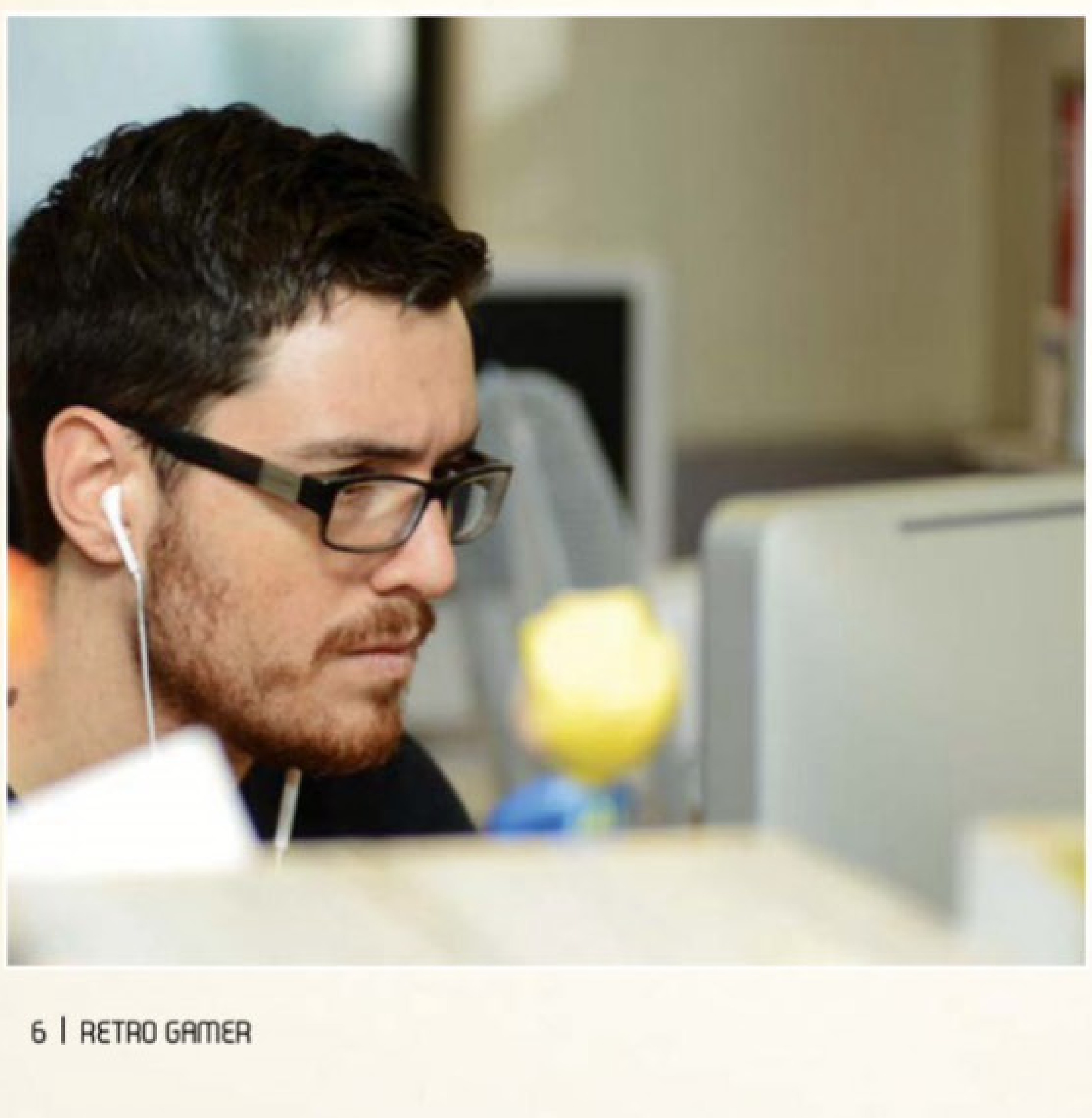
Take our 3-minute survey at retrogamer.net/survey and win a place on our panel



Hi. The team is incredibly passionate about creating **Retro Gamer** each month and we hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoy creating it. Every single one of our readers is important to us and we would love to receive your feedback so that we can improve the magazine and make it better for every one of you.

Darran Jones
Editor







» Join our panel and help us make the magazine even better!



Take the survey on any device

Complete our survey to join our Retro Gamer panel and:

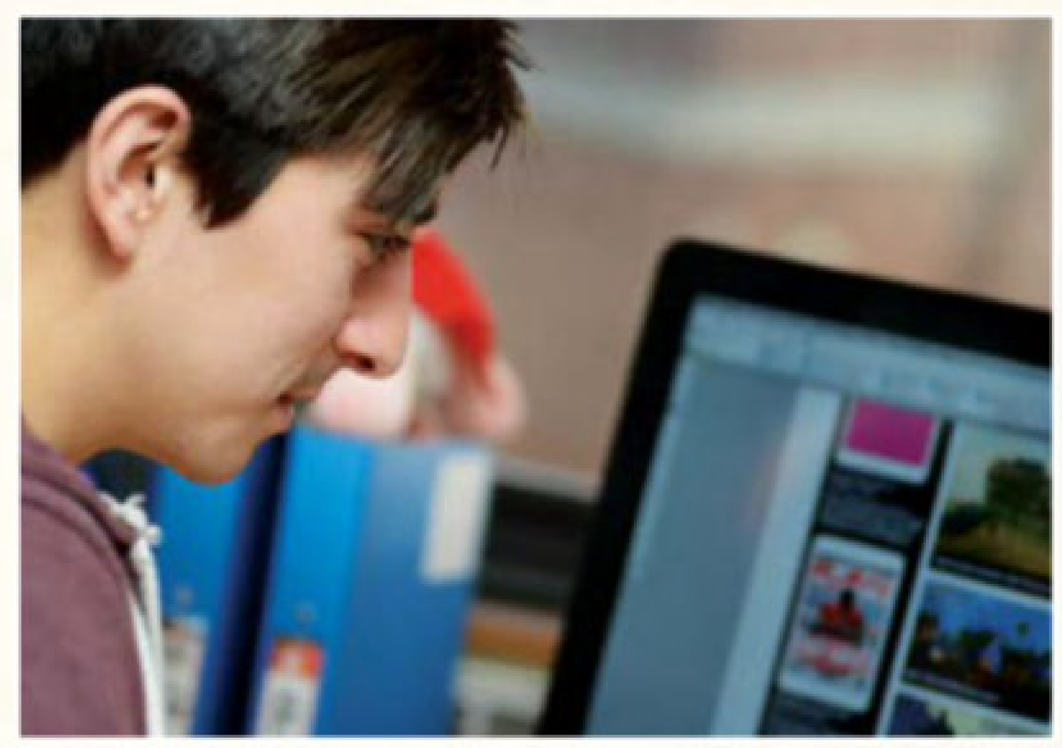
- See new ideas and changes before anyone else
- Get invited to attend special events in your area
- Test third-party products for review
- Have a chance to meet the **Retro Gamer** team
- Shape the future issues of the magazine
- Enter into exclusive competitions

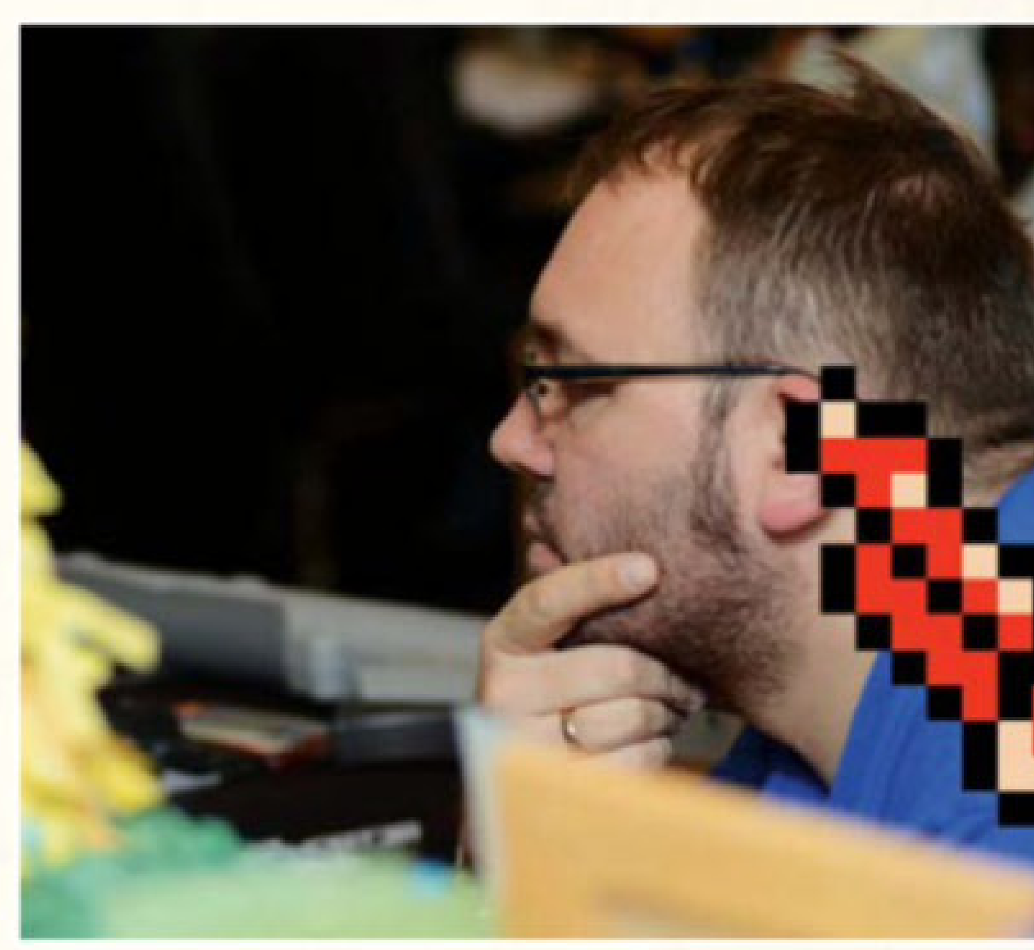
Step 1 Complete survey → **Step 2** Get involved → **Step 3** Earn rewards



» Take the chance to get closer to the team than ever before us make the magazine even better!

Only takes 3 mins!





Complete our survey and win your place today

retrogamer.net/survey





AMIGA POWER

We speak to Anthony Caulfield about his new Amiga documentary

CONTENTS

Fans of the Amiga may be aware that a new documentary is in the works highlighting the impact of Commodore's 16-bit machine. Created by Anthony and Nicola Caulfield, *From Bedrooms To Billions: The Amiga Years!* recently reached funding on Kickstarter. We caught up with Anthony to discover what Amiga fans can expect from the new documentary.

Why did you decide to choose to create a documentary that is based on the Amiga?

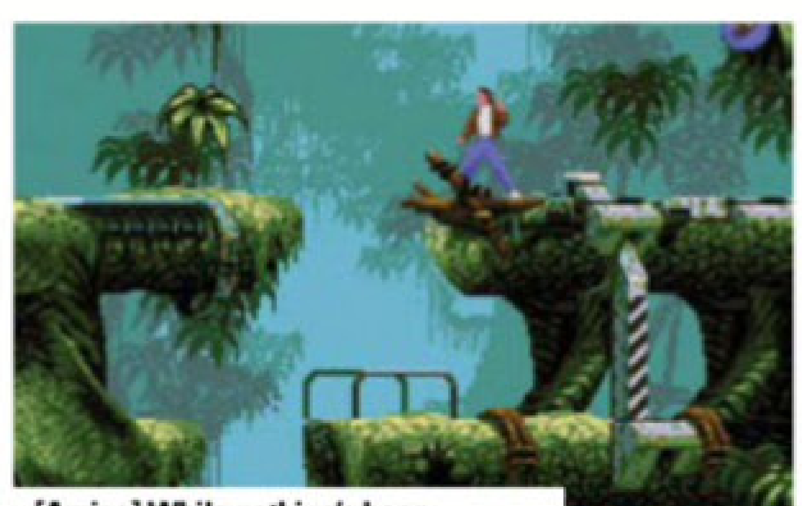
It became fairly apparent that to do the Amiga justice in the original '*From Bedrooms to Billions*' documentary, the movie would have ended up being over four hours long. To even attempt that would be damaging to both ideas, part of the reason *From Bedrooms To Billions* was originally conceived as a three-part TV series. The original film deals with the overall story arc of the Amiga era of development in relation to the story of the British games industry, but we had to gloss over what was a huge amount of material. We decided that should the first film be well-received [we would] press on and make a new standalone film about that era.

How much of the documentary is new footage because the trailer clearly shows footage that was shot for *From Bedrooms To Billions*?

The trailer is really a concept piece. Our intention is to shoot new interviews and populate the film with new footage. If we do use footage shot during the original *FBTB* shoot it would never, ever be footage that was used in the first film. Therefore this film will be entirely new footage as far as we're concerned.

Will there be a focus on the battle between the Atari ST and Amiga, as one wouldn't have had success without the other.

That's the way we see it. We intend to properly cover the ST as it did indeed drive the market along with the Amiga and also we had an ST before we got an Amiga so we're not going out to trash the Atari ST – far from it in fact!



» [Amiga] While nothing's been confirmed yet, we'd be very surprised if games like *Flashback* aren't covered.

How will this differ from the documentary, *Viva Amiga*?

To be honest we have no idea, there's room for both our productions, we are sure they're hard at work as are we, so all we can do is offer them all the best and get on with what we're doing.

What areas of the Amiga have you decided to focus on?

How the machine came to be designed and released; how it went on to change both development and the expectation of how games should be; music development; the demo scene and journalism. Also what actually happened with Commodore in the Nineties and why they went bust.

How much of the documentary will focus on public domain?

The community is still thriving today. To not cover it would be a mistake as it is a huge and integral part of the story. How much coverage we will give it, we cannot say until we are into production, as so many things are important, but as with the first film, it usually it finds its voice eventually!

READERS REACT

» Are you going to be buying The Amiga Years?

■ I backed this and it's just a shame that it fell 5k short of 100k as then they would have added another hour of footage. What's this other Amiga film that is being made?
POSTIEDOC

■ I don't get why ST fans would be annoyed... Someone wants to make an Amiga film... good for them. I was tempted to back... but I haven't watched *Bedrooms* yet so don't see the point in adding another DVD to the unwatched pile. Curious to see how it turns out though.
SLACEY1070

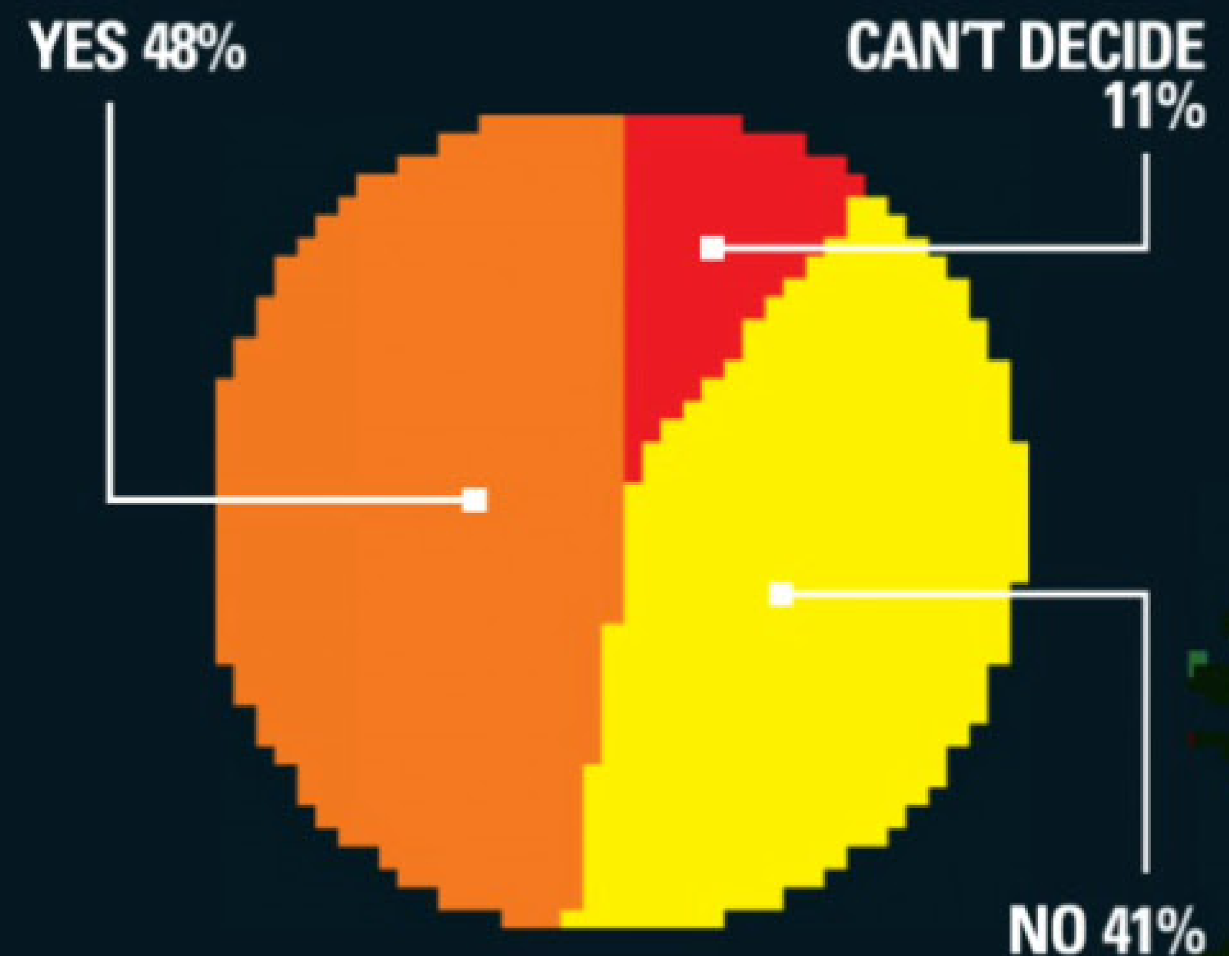
■ Although I didn't back the first, I've gone in head first with the 'Oli' perk and a signed poster. Now I need to get the original movie when I find out which version is best. This time around they're making one version.
PARANOID MARVIN

■ Oddly no. I absolutely loved *From Bedrooms To Billions* but as I didn't own an Amiga I don't think I'd get as much out of this. I'd be interested in seeing it at some point, but I don't have the urge own it or the need to see it ASAP like I did with *FBTB*.
THE_HAWK

■ It's not for me I'm afraid. While the first documentary covered a period I'm very interested in, I found it to be rather dull, mostly repeating the same things we have heard and read so many times before. It lacked originality and the presentation didn't make up for that at all, so it made possibly the most innovative period in gaming seem quite bland.
ANTIRIAD2097

■ No, not for me. Despite all the arguments there were two very similar machines around for that era, whose origins and markets were closely intertwined. I'd rather see a documentary that focussed on both. From the brief of this one it presents itself as quite biased from the start.
JOEFISH

■ I am really looking forward to the film. The Amiga is the best computer ever made in relation to everything else out at the time, and I'm glad the film will be focusing mainly on the Amiga. They have some great interviews lined up, and people I've never seen interviewed before, so I did not hesitate to back it in the slightest.
NECRONOM









» The head of Bullfrog was massively influential on the 16-bit systems, so expect more musings from Molyneux.

How long will the running time be and will it take the same 'talking heads' approach of before?
The film will now be between 90 minutes to 120 minutes. As for the style… Well there are many ways to make a documentary, we liked with the first film for it to appear that the people that lived through it guided you through rather than a voiceover, and with a voiceover written by the makers it then becomes more of our opinion.

What new developers will you be focusing on in *The Amiga Years*?
We're aiming for every developer who worked on the Amiga if they'll talk to us of course. So far, many have said yes.

Some backers weren't happy with *FBTB* receiving multiple funding. What will you be doing to avoid that happening this time around?
To be honest not a single backer has ever written to us saying that. Let's not forget this is a film project, there is always room for a little more archive footage, or music licensing. If you take our original Indiegogo backers in 2012, many very kindly just backed for a copy of a 90-minute film with 20-30 interviews planned for around £10. If they then did nothing further they could sit back and then when the film was finished receive a two and a half hours film containing around 100 interviews, with 20 minutes of extras which is excellent value for money. Films are generally funded through multiple sources, especially if you have high aims for the production but we never went back to our backers and said we couldn't finish the film or afford what we promised and that we needed more money from them.

There was a long wait for the original *From Bedrooms To Billions* documentary. How will this be avoided for *The Amiga Years*?
From Bedrooms to Billions took two and a half years to fund, shoot, edit, master and then release. The main reason it took longer than intended is there was so much interest after the first Indiegogo campaign from people wanting to get involved either as an interviewee but also from members of the public wanting to pre-order, which led us to run a Kickstarter campaign to raise some more funding strictly for archive footage and music. This then raised three times what we asked for so, of course, we then restructured the film to make it bigger and we think better than our initial plan. This time we want to raise as much funding as possible right from the start which we have done through Kickstarter and from people continuing to pre-order through our website of www.frombedroomstobillions.com so from the start of production we can just crack on and make the best film as planned right from the start. *



» Visitors can experience hands-on interaction with all kinds of devices, from retro arcade cabinets to modern displays.

NATIONAL VIDEOGAME ARCADE OPENS UP

NOTTINGHAM-BASED CENTRE AIMS TO EDUCATE AND ENTERTAIN

The National Videogame Arcade opened in Nottingham on 28th March, becoming the UK's first cultural centre dedicated to videogames. The five storey building offers a wide range of exhibitions for visitors, as well as special events and educational activities for schools. "You'll see and play things you haven't played before," stated Jonathan Smith, co-director at the National Videogame Arcade. "But, more importantly, you'll see games presented and talked about in a way you haven't seen before, which unites different audiences and affords games the respect and cultural honour they deserve."

Amongst the exhibits found at the National Videogame Arcade are original arcade cabinets for games such as *Donkey Kong* and *Track & Field* as well as production discs for games such as *Doom II* and *Grand Theft Auto*. Visitors will also be able to get their hands on rarely-seen consoles such as the Virtual Boy and Neo Geo, as well as more common nostalgic favourites including the Spectrum, Amiga, SNES and Dreamcast. Full-price tickets cost £8.50, with £6.50 for concessions and £20 for a family ticket. Discounts are available on all prices for members. For more information, and a programme of events, visit gamecity.org.

ATARI LAWYERS DELIVER A TXKO

PC AND PS4 PORTS OF LLAMASOFT'S SHOOTER BLOCKED

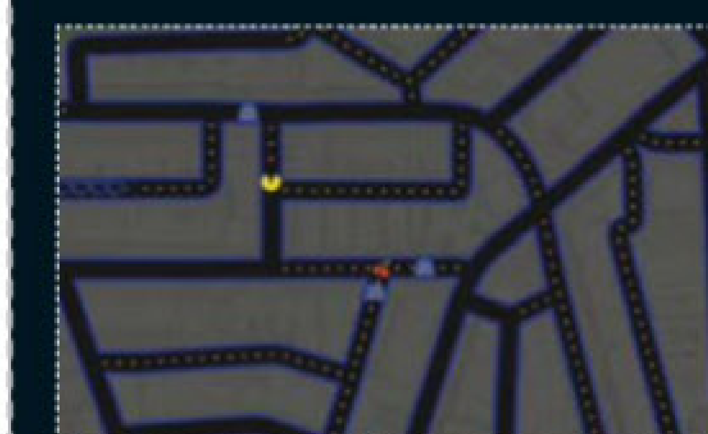
Llamasoft's shoot-'em-up, *TxK*, has become the centre of controversy after Jeff Minter revealed that Atari has blocked the release of new versions of the game, citing copyright infringement with relation to the *Tempest* series. The game was released for PlayStation Vita in 2014, and scored 96% when reviewed in issue 127 of **Retro Gamer**. Near complete versions for PC and PS4 were shown to players at the Play Expo in Manchester in October 2014, but now they can't be released. Jeff has said that "realising I was going to be disappointing all those people, and everyone else waiting for the ports, really upset me." We were unable to reach Atari for comment, but a press release for *Asteroids: Outpost* mentions that the company is also considering reviving *Tempest* alongside other classic games. More news soon.



» [Vita] *TxK* is an excellent game, but Atari has taken the view that it is an intellectual property infringement.

PAC-MAN IN THE URBAN JUNGLE

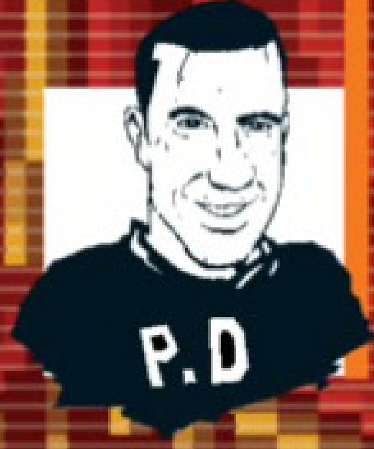
Internet search giant Google celebrated April Fools' Day by teaming up with Bandai Namco to bring *Pac-Man* to city streets worldwide. Users of Google Maps could click a special *Pac-Man* button to convert roads into mazes for the yellow dot muncher to traverse. This enabled unusual environments to be used as playfields as compared to those *Pac-Man* is used to, and much of the fun was found in finding ideal real-world mazes. This isn't the first time Google has celebrated the arcade icon – a playable Google Doodle celebrating *Pac-Man*'s 30th anniversary in 2010 is said to have distracted millions of office workers worldwide.



VIRTUAL CONSOLE COLLECTION GROWS

Nintendo has added two more platforms to its Wii U Virtual Console, launching N64 and DS games on the service. This is the first time that DS games have been made available on a retro download service, while N64 games accompanied the original Wii's Virtual Console from launch but have taken time to arrive on the Wii U. *Super Mario 64* and *Donkey Kong 64* are the first games available from the N64's range, while *Mario Kart DS* and *WarioWare Touched!* kick things off for DS games. Games announced for release in May 2015 include *Paper Mario* and *Yoshi's Island DS*.





Here's my bio… Paul Davies
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.

Happy Endings

I did something unheard and blasphemous of the other day, I quit the credits for a game I'd just completed, I didn't even flinch. I know, right? I'm worried this might happen again and I'll miss something awesome.

'Have you seen the ending?!' This was the question on everybody's lips whenever a major new game arrived on console. You had to answer honestly because your friends would know that you were lying. Besides, you ran the risk of spoilers if you hadn't actually experienced the final fanfare. And curses befell those that claimed to have unlocked the Hard Ending after rushing through on Easy.

How I valued the end sequences of my favourite games, from the 8-bit home computing era all the way through to PS3 and Xbox 360. The comic pantomime of *Super Mario World* or the character specific journeys of the World Warriors in *Street Fighter II*, they made the hard work so worth it. Though, I must confess to not sitting through the entirety of the *Twin Kingdom Valley* (BBC Micro) rendering of a priceless jewel. In fact, I am quite sure that I went and ate Sunday dinner and then came back to admire what hundreds of colourful criss-crossing lines had become. I was awestruck.

Reaching that pinnacle and enjoying the spoils was a personal moment to savour, adrenaline still coursing through my veins. Ever since the talk of J*et Set Willy* falling into his toilet in the very early days, something cool was almost always waiting at the end of a journey as a gift from the gods before the message "Thank You For Playing" appeared.

Lately, game endings are week-long credit scrolls while the soundtrack loops over and over. Only until very recently did I sit and stare to absorb the hundreds of names responsible for bringing the likes of *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* to existance. Realising I was doing this for precisely nothing, I of course began having a serious conversation with myself. I could've clocked *Killer Gorilla* lots of times in the hour it took to see who marketed *Assassin's Creed* in Tunisia or whatever.

See, another reason to wait for the very end in the good old days was to discover the rewards you might've earned for conquering the game, and often under certain conditions. Plus, those rewards only belonged to you because they existed only on your 'Game Pak' or memory card.

How precious is a copy of Nintendo's *1080: Snowboarding* with Ice Boarder, Gold Boarder and Panda Boarder unlocked. Oh, and much, much better yet *Super Mario Kart* with every Cup. 'How is it that my version of *Super Mario World* has weird looking enemies and colour-scheme?' you ask, why it's because I put in the effort and this is my reward. The cartridge even seems alive somehow.

Now, it's all about the grind for loot, which feels like completing *Jet-Pac* over and over for nicer hats. I'm cool with this because I was forced to complete *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* again on hard mode after I'd remapped the buttons and Knight Arthur fell off the screen at the beginning of the end sequence, therefore unable to perform his grandstanding ending routine. Anyhow, designers: remember cool stuff at the end. Okay?! *



What do you think?
Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK | @RetroGamer_Mag | retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk | www.retrogamer.net/forum

DISCUSS

What's the first game you purchased?

Forum
www.retrogamer.net/forum

■ First game I bought was *3D Defender* for the ZX81. I was initially confused (being 11) but got the hang of it
AceGrace

■ The first purchase I remember making with my hard earned pocket money was a pack of 4 games from Comet, one of which was a game called *Ghouls* by Micro Power. Despite not being very good at it, I loved that game at the time. I think this was partly because I stumped up the cash for it, but also I liked the characters, too. Looking back on it, it wasn't that good…
tapmantwo

■ The first game I actually bought with my own money was Activision's *Grand Prix* on the Atari 2600. I used all my birthday money and it cost me £30. I absolutely loved it and played it to death.
PaulEMoz

■ First game/console I bought was a SNES with *SMW*, I loved it. I worked full time, 9-5 at a carpet wholesalers for £40 to afford them
crusto

Twitter
Twitter.com/@RetroGamer_mag

■ I think it was probably *Phoenix* on the Atari 2600. Cost me flippin' nearly £30 from John Menzies, too!
@Kosmikat

■ Pleading with my mam to take me out to buy *Pokemon Yellow* with my pocket money savings. She did & thus an obsession was born
@Haruto__

■ Me and my cousins put our money together and purchased *Sonic 2*. We didn't get any sleep that weekend.
@hentaigirl82

■ Mine was weirdly *Bugs Bunny Crazy Castle*, on the Game Boy. Bit turd, but the music was ace!
@pablo_0151

■ September 1983, *Manic Miner* for the ZX Spectrum – oh, those were the days…
@simon_lindsell

■ *Treasure Island Dizzy* for the CPC 464. My god it was hard.
@Spardin1982

■ First one I ever purchased myself? *Kirby's Adventure* on NES! Still love it!
@daswhalebeard

Facebook
facebook.com/RetroGamerUK

■ *Mega Man 3* for the NES. I bought it with some birthday money, my cousin and I sat and played it through my entire birthday party.
Jeremy-Aaron Bates

■ *Pac-Man* & *Donkey Kong* for Atari 2600. I didn't know any better at the time.
Anthony Lucisano

■ *Target: Renegade* for the Spectrum 128k – a great game!!
Paul Collins

■ *Space Invaders* for the 2600. I didn't even own the system.
Ronald A Laski Jr.

■ I think mine was either *Ghostbusters* or *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* on my Amstrad CPC 464. It would take hours to load and I could never get past the second level.
Lee J. Whiles

■ *Radar Rat Race* and *Gorf* with the Vic-20. The beginning…
Andrea Aiossi

■ *Harrier Attack* for the Spectrum and yes, I did bomb my own carrier.
Daniel Richardson

■ *Renegade*, the cover looked so cool.
Gazz Brown

"First game/console I bought with work wages was a SNES with SMW, obviously I loved it."
Crusto





What We Think

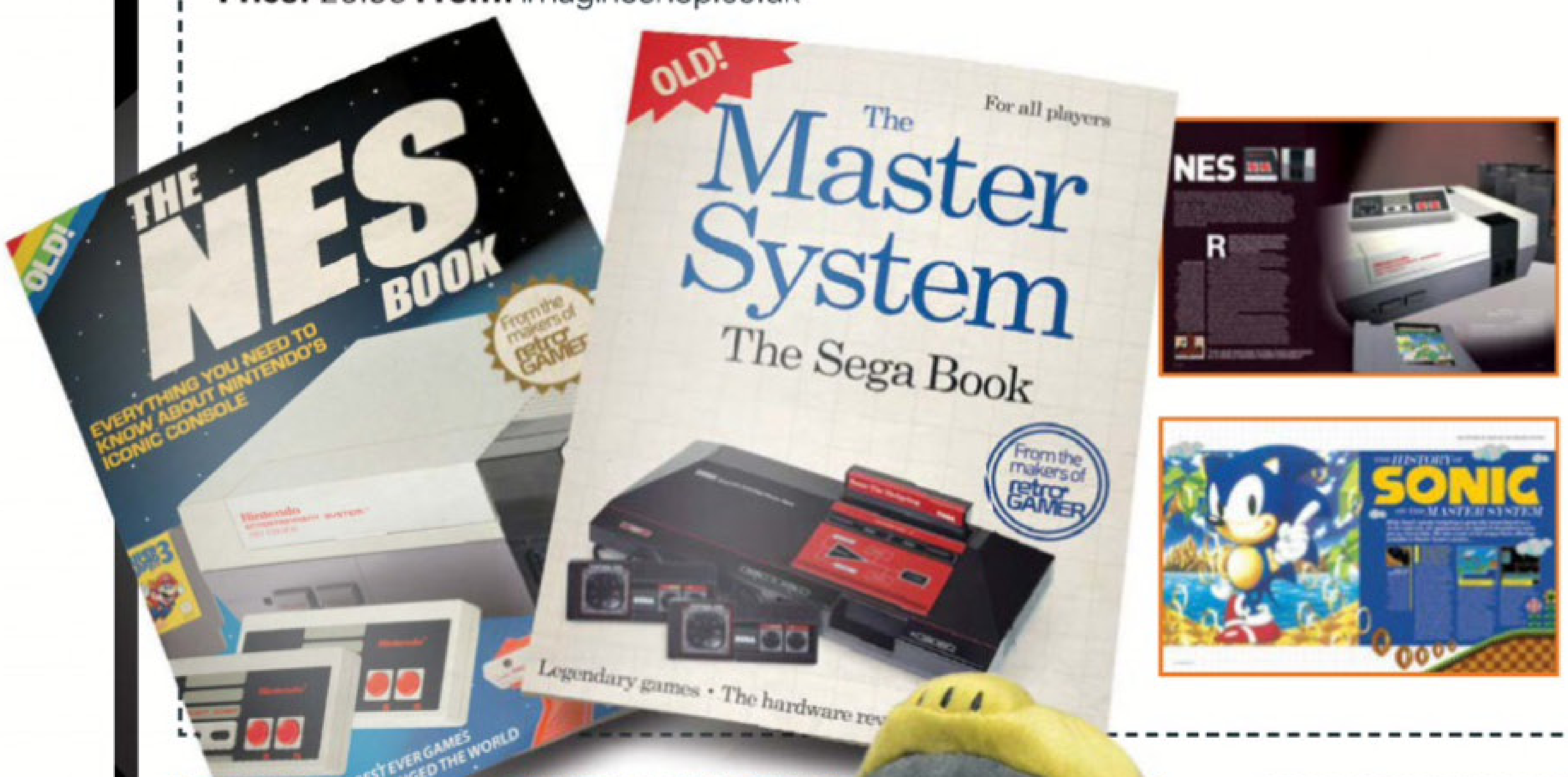
■ Despite receiving two packs of Amsoft games with my Amstrad CPC I still felt the need to buy a new game with my birthday money. After cycling to Poole with my friends I settled on a Mastertronic game called *The Apprentice*, because it looked like a fun adventure. The reality was massively different and I'm still upset about it.

PICK OF THE MONTH

The NES/Master System Book

Our latest bookazine turns the spotlight on Nintendo's and Sega's 8-bit offerings, delivering plenty of nostalgic fun whether you grew up with Mario and Link or Alex Kidd and Sonic. Each side collects classic features from past issues of **Retro Gamer**, including original Retroinspection and Collector's Guide features as well as in-depth looks at individual games and series including *Super Mario Bros. 3*, *Alex Kidd* and more. We've also included some brand new articles on the likes of *Metroid*, the *Sonic* series and *Castle Of Illusion* to ensure comprehensive coverage of the best games on each of these beloved systems.

Price: £9.99 **From:** imagineshop.co.uk



ColecoVision Flashback

The ColecoVision gave Atari a brief but massive scare in the early Eighties, and now it's back in plug-and-play form with 60 built-in games to experience all over again. These include 48 original games including major conversions from the Eighties such as *Zaxxon*, *Cosmic Avenger*, *Miner 2049er* and *Choplifter*, as well as 12 new games such as the impressive homebrew releases *Princess Quest* and *Mecha-8*, which makes it rather desirable.

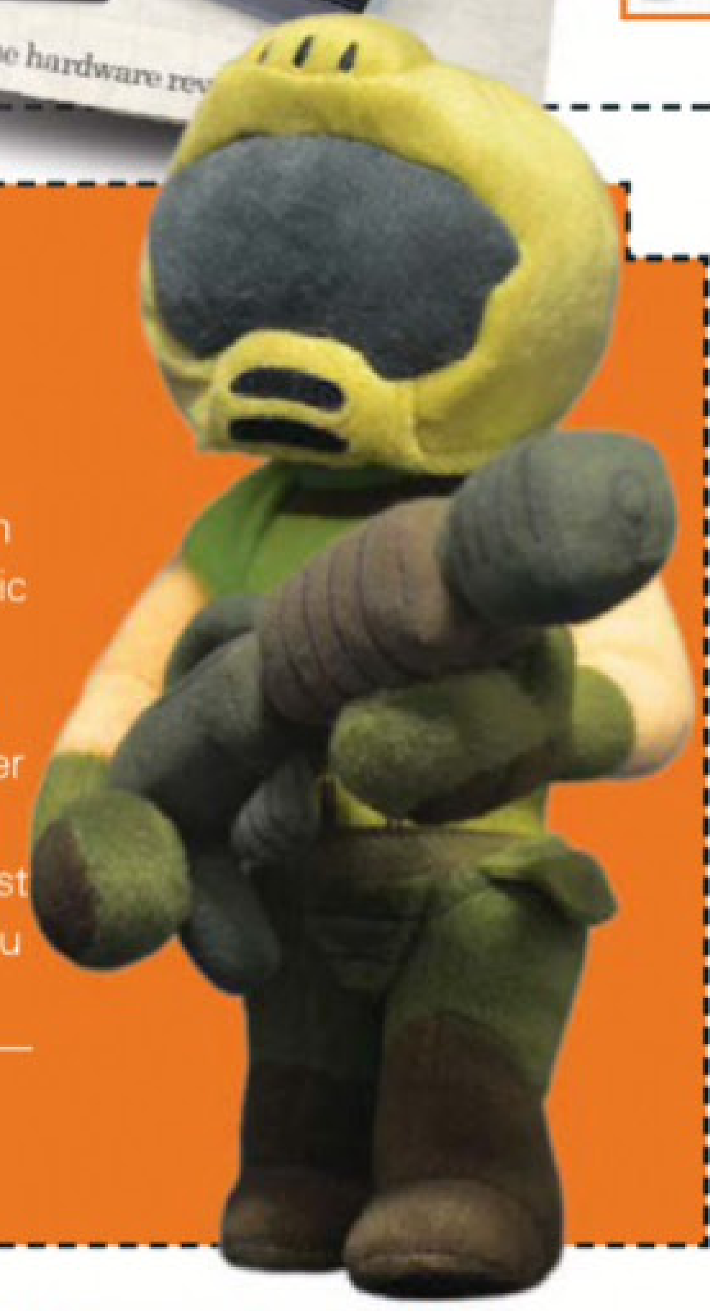
Price: £49.99
From: funstock.co.uk



Doom Space Marine Plush

Doom certainly isn't the most cuddly of games – we've always felt that it had a slightly bloody, squishy feeling, if it's possible to assign such characteristics to an actual videogame. Despite all that, the iconic space marine that you get to play in the classic videogame is now available in plush form, perfect for those of you that have ever wanted to imagine playing *Doom* in plush form, or just give the lone soldier a hug. Just don't be surprised when he doesn't hug you back. He's not real you see.

Price: £19.99
From: gamerabilia.co.uk



Alien Syndrome T-Shirt

Alien Syndrome doesn't get the most love when it comes to classic Sega merchandise, so we're pleased to see this T-shirt giving some recognition to the creepy arcade blaster. If you're unfamiliar with the artwork, it comes from the Japanese Mark III conversion of the game, using the classic red and white colour scheme characteristic of instruction manuals from that era.
Price: £19.99 **From:** 8ball.co.uk



USB Gamecube Controller

Nintendo has always had a very distinctive way of making controllers, which means that its fans can be found at a bit of a loss on other platforms. Luckily, this USB controller for PC and Mac replicates the extremely unusual layout of the Gamecube pad, enabling players to once again delight in the feel of those distinctive kidney-shaped buttons. It should make the PC version of *Resident Evil 4* more authentic.

Price: £19.99
From: funstock.co.uk





DUVET SET
"I remember reading about this in an issue of *OPM* and I thought it was amazing and I wished I could have it. Ten years later I got my wish; now I just need the curtains to match!"
PAID: £25

BEACH TOWELS
"The franchise has spawned a few towels, I think about eight off the top of my head. The older ones are all bright and vivid and just remind me of how badass classic Lara was."
PAID: £25

SKATEBOARD PROTECTION GEAR
"This gear presumably sold alongside the skateboards that were made. I don't think I've seen this set again on the internet – now if I can just get my hands on a *TR* skateboard…"
PAID: £25

TOMB RAIDER PLAYSTATION BIG BOX RELEASE
"It looks like the PC big box release but it's actually a limited edition of the PlayStation version that contains a Lara CD clock. I couldn't believe my eyes when I spotted it!"
PAID: £50

EDITION LIMITED PLAYSTATION DOUBLEPACK
"If the amount of merch is anything to go by, *Tomb Raider* was very popular in France. This is sealed and I love the box as it's so pretty."
PAID: £40

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

THAT PIECE YOU CAN'T BE WITHOUT

TOMB RAIDER III 1998 MOET & CHANDON CHAMPAGNE

■ "These bottles were made by Core and Eidos to celebrate the release of the game. I had seen it listed on eBay only to be removed due to it being alcohol. I got in touch with the seller, though, who was still happy to sell it. Cheers!"
PAID: £60



BIO

NAME: Becca Petrie

ESTIMATED VALUE: £2000

FAVOURITE CONSOLE: PlayStation

FAVOURITE GAME: *Tomb Raider 2* (PlayStation)

Collectors corner

Readers take us through the retro keyhole

This month we bring you a much smaller and more focused collection which may lack the sprawling madness of some of our previous collectors, but is still mightily impressive nonetheless. Becca, as you may have gathered, is a huge *Tomb Raider* fan, so our inevitable first question is what attracts her so much to the series? "Because Lara is a badass!" She laughs, "I love her no-nonsense attitude. She's always jet-setting from one location to another so every part of her adventure is interesting."

Becca was a tender three years old when the original *Tomb Raider* game was released on the PlayStation; her earliest memory of the series is watching her father play *Tomb Raider 2*. We suddenly feel very old. "Eventually I got impatient waiting for him to get home and tried to play it myself," she recalls.

The PlayStation was the console of choice in the Petrie family and Becca freely admits she probably spends more time playing her favourites from the mid to late Nineties – specifically *Spyro, Crash Bandicoot, Pandemonium* and *Rayman* – than modern games. But of the *Tomb Raider* series, the first sequel remains her favourite, and not just for nostalgic reasons. "I just love everything about it: the story was great, the locations varied, from China to Venice, a sunken ship, an oil rig. And Lara's in-game model is my favourite of the series as well." And while Becca remains ambivalent towards the movie adaptations starring Angelina Jolie ("the first one was alright but generally I just don't watch them,"), she enjoyed the recent series reboot. "I did enjoy playing it and both the game and Lara look fantastic," she admits, "but I still much prefer the older 'badass-with-class' Lara. But I'm very interested in seeing how Lara's adventures play out in the future!" ★

> **"Lara is a badass! I love her no-nonsense attitude… She's always jet-setting from one location to another"**
> Becca Petrie



Simon Thomley

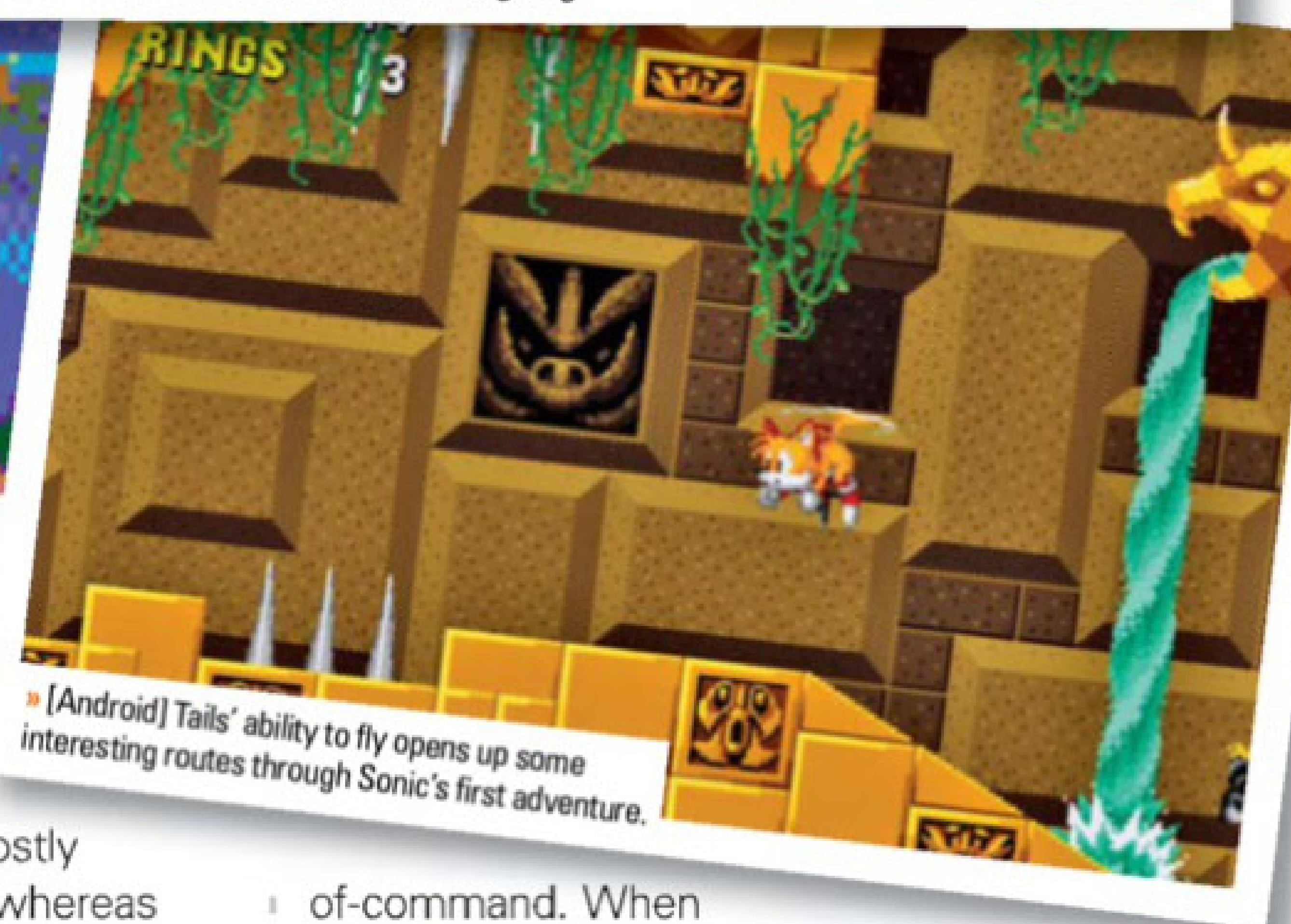
The Headcannon programmer discusses remastering Sonic's Mega Drive games for mobiles



» [Mega Drive] While Simon would like to work on original projects, *Ristar* is a preferred candidate for remastering.



» [Android] The presence of Tails is an exclusive feature for the mobile remaster of *Sonic The Hedgehog*.



» [Android] Tails' ability to fly opens up some interesting routes through Sonic's first adventure.

How did you get the job of remastering the *Sonic* games?
Since 1997, I had worked on several *Sonic*-related fan projects, which led to a better understanding of how the original games worked internally. Some of my projects included making major modifications to the original games and even recreating portions of them on other platforms.

In 2009, Christian Whitehead had decided to pitch to Sega a remaking of *Sonic CD* built for iOS using his *Retro Engine*. He chose this game because while Sega had already been using emulation to bring other games to the platform, Mega-CD emulation was too difficult to be viable at the time. Impressed with my work, and having known me previously, he contacted me to ask if I could help by reverse engineering parts of the original game so that he could reproduce them accurately.

Originally he didn't get very far in his contact with Sega, but shortly afterward, the Sega America blog had asked fans which game they wanted to see come to iOS next, so Christian took the opportunity to publicise his pitch video and ask for public support. I continued to assist until the project was officially taken on, at which point I had to step back for the moment. Afterward, Sega were considering bringing the original *Sonic* to Android for the first time using emulation. With his reputation established, Christian was able to convince them to go for a similar remaster instead, and also to bring me onto the project.

Unlike most retro game projects, the *Sonic* remasters don't use emulation software. What advantages does this bring?
Emulation is basically a layer between the machine and a program that was written for a different machine to interpret what the program wants to do and tell the machine how to do it. This is actually pretty costly in terms of performance, whereas you don't need this step when the program is written to speak natively to the machine running it. This is why the remasters performed so much better on iOS than the emulated versions they replaced.

Another benefit of this is the ability to take advantage of exciting aspects of the new hardware, rather than being limited to the hardware for which the program was originally written, in such cases as the wide-screen, remastered music, and rotation/translucency effects. Further, it then becomes more easily possible to add bonus features such as the extra playable characters, new modes such as a Boss Attack mode.

Your version of *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* contains a completed version of the long-lost Hidden Palace Zone. How did that go down with Sega?
Christian and I had discussed including the Hidden Palace Zone very early on, and when it came time to work on *Sonic 2*, we brought the idea forward to our contact in Sega, who then sent it on its way up the chain-of-command. When they were convinced that it would be a worthwhile addition, we were told that the original level was cut due to clashing with the overall design of the rest of the game and just not being fun. We were tasked with creating a version of the level that impressed both Takashi Iizuka and Yuji Naka, and we were told that if we couldn't do this, then the level would be cut again. Ultimately, we ended up filling in some missing details and creating a level with more of a flow, similar to the other levels in *Sonic 2*, with which both parties were thankfully pleased enough to approve.

Are there any other classic games you'd like to remaster?
For me, the best part of this project was getting involved with *Sonic*, and I would have loved to follow-up with new classic-style games. I have several original concepts I would like to pursue with my own *Headcannon Game Engine*, but I wouldn't be opposed to a few more remaster projects now and then. Christian and I had actually discussed a few; *Ristar* comes to mind. *



» [Android] Even *Sonic & Knuckles* didn't let you speed through the Spring Yard Zone with Knuckles.

BACK TO THE NINETIES



» [Neo-Geo] *Metal Slug* returns for a second outing and it's as playable and humorous as ever not to mention that it looks *gorgeous*.

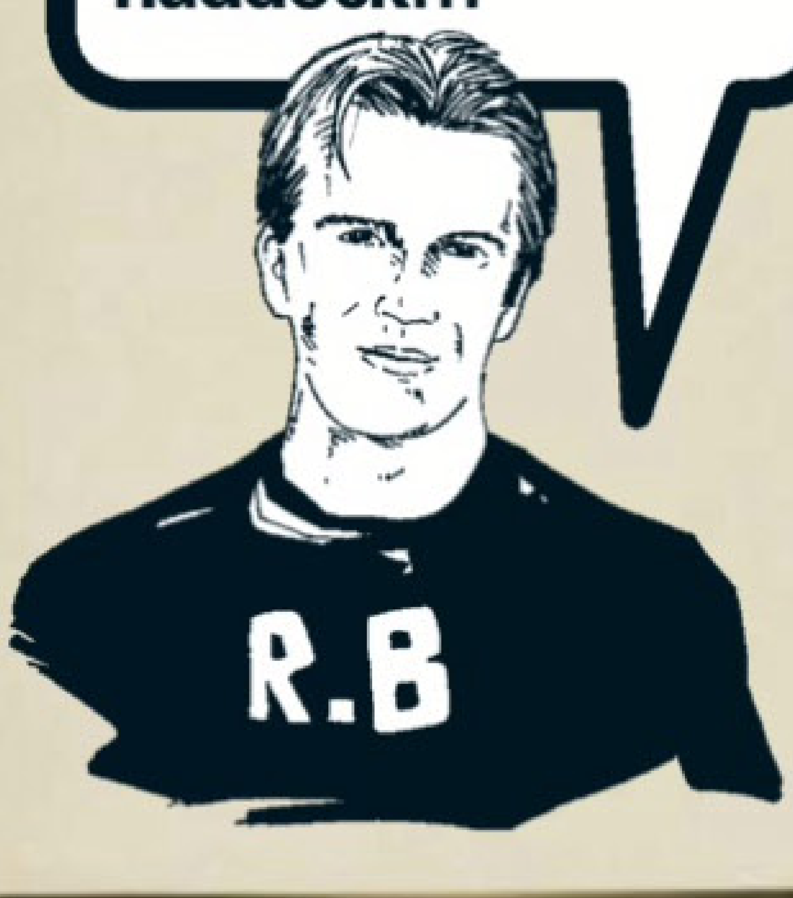


» [PlayStation] Prepare for some colourful blasting, fast paced manoeuvring and some really big robot fish.



THE LATEST NEWS FROM APRIL 1998

APRIL 1998 – Gremlin release a hat-trick of racers with Motorhead, Buggy and N2O, Battlezone is back, Vapor TRX takes a wrong turn, SNK's Metal Slug returns, while G-Darius takes on the big fish. Richard Burton can smell haddock…



Ready for release on PC was a new racing game by Gremlin Interactive. *Motorhead* was a futuristic racer featuring vehicles with the all the dynamics and mechanics of a modern day racing car.

It was stupendously fast and the ability to power slide and take corners at speed was wonderfully done. Graphically excellent, the mood of the game was enhanced by the lighting that was more sombre and foreboding than usual games of this ilk.

Further cars and tracks could be unlocked the further you progress and could be played in single player mode or against seven others via the Internet or a LAN network. Whichever way you played *Motorhead*, it was testing and enjoyable game that spanned the gap between future and modern day racing games rather well.

Gremlin also had news that its radio controlled car game, *Buggy*, for PlayStation was progressing well. With 16 different buggies to race over 15 assorted courses, you would not only have to stay on track at speed to beat your competitors, aided and abetted by a whole bunch of groovy power-ups, but also slip through the slalom-style gates that hang along the track in a way not too dissimilar to Tatsumi's 1985 arcade game *Buggy Boy*. *Buggy* would become a nice racing game with multi-player options. It would also become an utterly unremarkable and non offensive piece of vanilla-flavoured game.

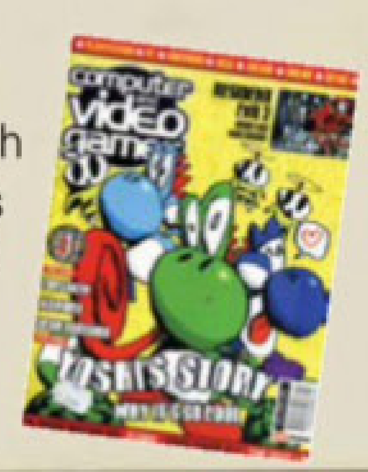
In a triple threat for fans of speed Gremlin also had another PlayStation project nearing completion, the tunnel runner and shoot-'em-up *N2O: Nitrous Oxide*. You flew your ship around the tunnel walls blasting a host of insects with lasers, enhancing your weaponry with countless opportunities to pick up power-ups. With its atmospherically designed tunnels that have an almost organic feel and gameplay that harked backed to the days of *Tempest*, *N20* was a shooter that deserved to do well particularly with retro gaming favourite Antony Crowther, who gave us *Potty Pigeon*, *Blagger* and *Wanted: Monty Mole* on the Commodore 64, behind the development.

Out this month was a reimagining of a true retrogaming classic, *Battlezone* by Atari on PC. This time around Activision developed the game with tanks featuring prominently, yet the

THIS MONTH IN…

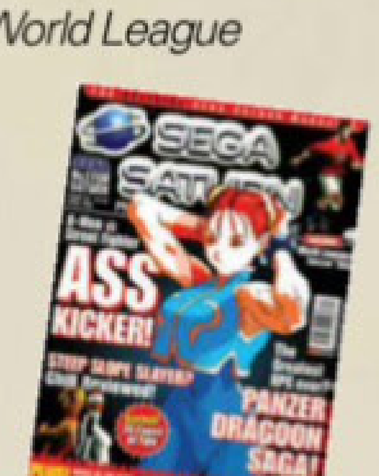
COMPUTER & VIDEOGAMES

There was confirmation that Sega's new Dreamcast console would be out in Japan this November with Europe having to wait until September 1999. Apparently Sega didn't think that the launch title, *Virtua Fighter 3*, was strong enough as a Euro launch title, so would have to be delayed.



OFFICIAL SEGA SATURN MAGAZINE

OSSM ran an interview with Silicon Dreams, the company behind the football game of the summer, *World League Soccer '98*. Robert Palfreman, the director, gushed about the animation quality and how they used Les Ferdinand for motion capture.



GAME PRO

Game Pro also had news on Sega and its new console. Sega's woes were confirmed with the gradual demise of the Saturn and Sega laying off a quarter of its staff, but on a lighter note the new console was already on its third codename having discarded *Black Belt* and *Dural* for *Katana*.





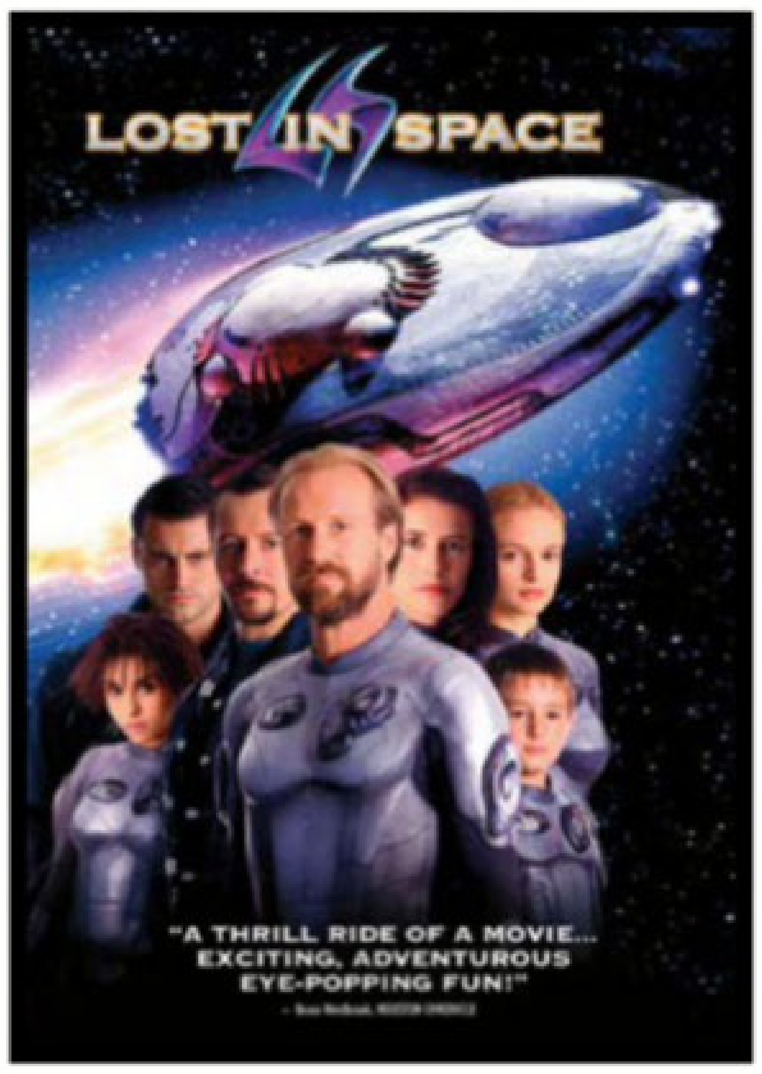
CHARTS

NEWS APRIL 1998

12 April saw the engineering game show *Scrapheap Challenge* premiere on Channel 4. Hosted by Robert Llewellyn (Kryten from Red Dwarf), *Scrapheap Challenge* would see teams rummage through a scrap-yard to find suitable material in their task in building a working vehicle or machine. This would later be raced/tested against the opposition team's invention. It ran for 11 series until its demise in 2010 after 156 episodes.

17 April saw the death of Linda McCartney, photographer, musician and wife of Paul McCartney. The couple had started the Linda McCartney vegetarian range of foods in 1991 as both were strict vegetarians and animal activists. She died at the age of 56 after a long battle with breast cancer.

3 April saw the world premiere of *Lost In Space*, a modern day take



Danger, danger Will Robertson! Nineties sci-fi remake in the vicinity and beware, it's not particularly good.

on the popular Sixties science fiction television series. It starred William Hurt as John Robinson, Gary Oldman as Dr Zachary Smith and Matt LeBlanc as Major Don West.

With over the top acting and general campiness, *Lost In Space* didn't flourish at the box office, which was a shame as there was an overriding feeling of fun throughout despite its obvious flaws.

1 April saw another big movie release with *Mercury Rising* starring the likes of Bruce Willis who plays an FBI agent sent to look after a young boy, an autistic savant, who incredibly breaks an unbreakable and dangerously top secret government code. Naughty people with guns try to get to the boy but Mr Willis does what he does best; shoots things and, ultimately, saves the day.

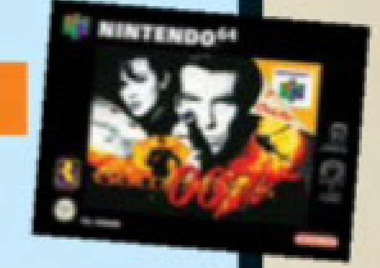
APRIL 1998

PLAYSTATION



1. Cool Boarders 2 (Sony)
2. Nagano Winter Olympics (Sony)
3. FIFA '98: Road To The World Cup (Electronic Arts)
4. Grand Theft Auto (BMG)
5. Micro Machines V3: Platinum (Codemasters)

NINTENDO 64



1. GoldenEye 007 (Nintendo)
2. Nagano Winter Olympics (Konami)
3. Diddy Kong Racing (Nintendo)
4. FIFA '98: The Road To The World Cup (Electronic Arts)
5. Super Mario 64 (Nintendo)

PC



1. Grand Theft Auto (BMG)
2. Championship Manager '97-98 (Eidos)
3. FIFA '98: Road To The World Cup (Electronic Arts)
4. Tomb Raider 2 (Eidos)
5. Quake 2 (Activision)

MUSIC



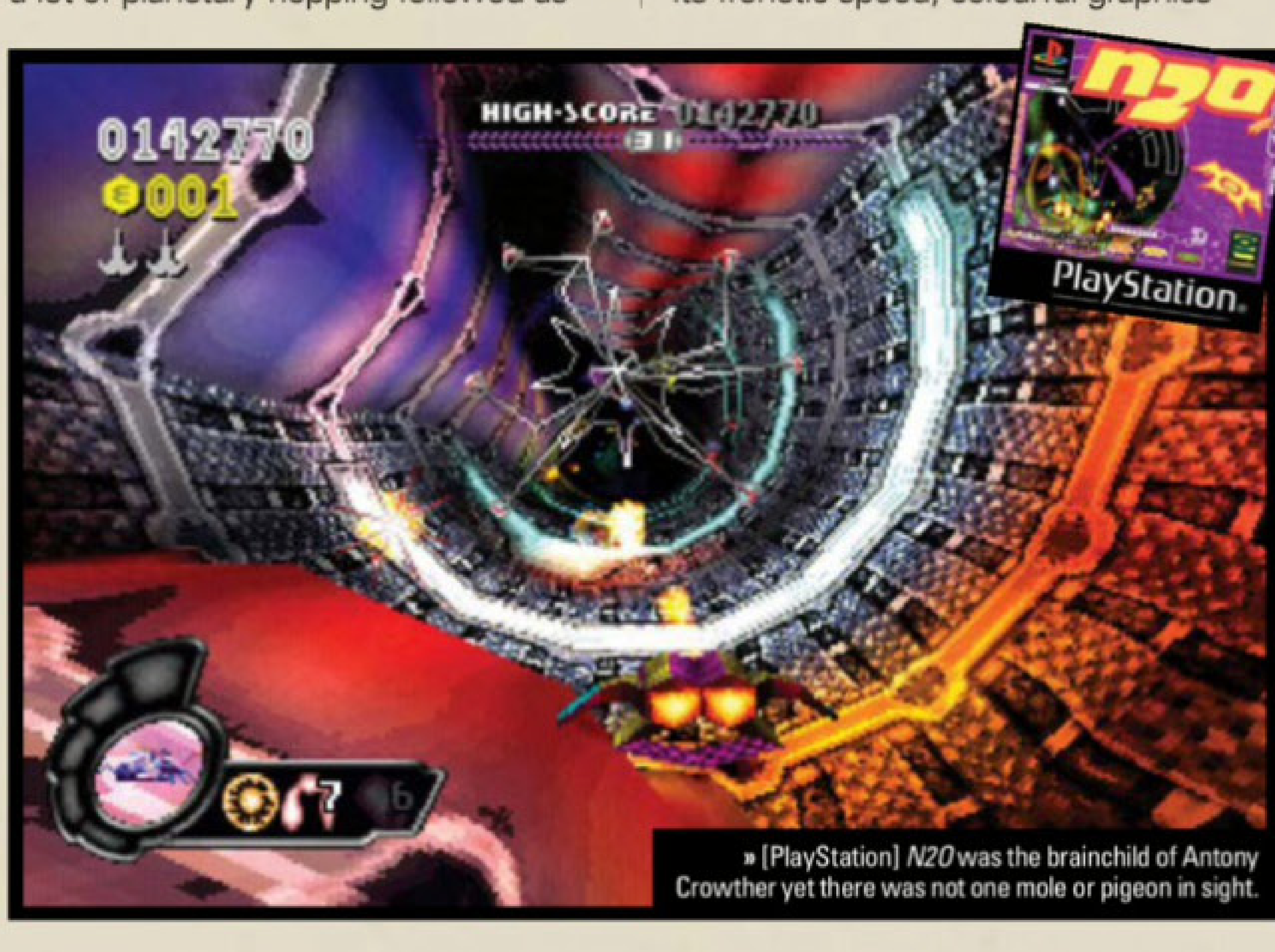
1. It's Like That (Run DMC vs Jason Nevins)
2. My Heart Will Go On (Celine Dion)
3. Turn It Up / Fire It Up (Busta Rhymes)
4. Truly Madly Deeply (Savage Garden)
5. Kiss The Rain (Billie Myers)

comparisons with *Battlezone* of old didn't end there. This *Battlezone* was a smart amalgamation of first-person shooter and real-time strategy wrapped up inside a tank simulation giving us something with depth and playability.

Battlezone is set in the Sixties and Seventies where the Russians and Americans are squabbling over bio-metal, a sentient alien material that can be formed into a super weapon. They are forced into harvesting expeditions to find as much of this material as they ca and you can play as either side in their respective campaigns. Aside from the campaign modes there are also multi-player modes consisting of Deathmatch and Strategy.

Once you decide on your allegiance, a lot of planetary hopping followed as the two superpowers battled it out on a variety of moons and planets ensuring plenty of tank cockpit fighting, first-person shooter blasting and some precise strategic and tactical movements with the balance between the two genres weighted evenly, helped in no small part with a superbly designed front end interface that is very easy to learn and use. *Battlezone* may owe its origins to a Eighties coin-op of the same name but the class of 1998 edition stands on its own as something of quality. A classic of a classic.

Atari released its newest coin-op into arcadeland this month with the futuristic hover racing game, *Vapor TRX*. Although gameplay was the usual same old hat, *Vapor TRX* played well with its frenetic speed, colourful graphics and nicely defined courses. However, the sheer numbers of racing games available across all formats meant that unless it was something really special, it would be forgotten quickly. Sadly *Vapor TRX* fell into this category and melted into the background.



» [PlayStation] *N2O* was the brainchild of Antony Crowther yet there was not one mole or pigeon in sight.

If you were hankering for some good old fashioned shoot-'em-up action then Taito's release of *G-Darius* was very welcome. *G-Darius* followed a similar formula to previous *Darius* outings being a 2D horizontal scrolling shoot-'em-up but this time with some crisply presented 3D polygon sprites. While most of the gameplay is familiar, a couple of new attacking options are at your disposal. You can now add enemies to your arsenal by using a Capture Ball. It snags them and they follow and assist obediently. There's also the mighty Alpha Beam which laid waste to all and sundry. This was also be used in a beam jousting contest with the end of level huge robotic fish (yes, fish) bosses in a button mashing session to see whose beam is the stronger. *G-Darius* was what it was, a blast fest with delightful graphics and equally lovely sound that left you aching and tired, albeit very happy.

There was more blasting but this time at a less frenetic pace, with the Neo-Geo AES release of *Metal Slug 2*, the run-and-gun favourite from SNK. It was pretty much the same as the origina; run along shooting the enemies, jump in the occasional vehicle and rescue the regularly dotted around POWs whilst seeing off an end of level boss. As usual most of the background and scenery could be destroyed revealing power-ups. You can also choose from four different characters, each with their own strengths and weaknesses, and there's also several new weapons and vehicles to play with along the way. Your character can also be transformed during play into a mummy or a very rotund chap triggered by poison gas attacks and over eating food supplies respectively. Good for comedy value, but not for your speed of movement and attack. *Metal Slug 2* was essentially more of the same but that wasn't a bad thing was it? ✱


BY BRANDON JAME
LIVES 2 LEVEL 01
AIR



Blagger

"IT WILL BE NICE WORKING WITH PROPER VILLAINS AGAIN"

#87

» BRANDON JAMES » COMMODORE 16 » 1985

***Blagger* is a platformer which is very much in the style of *Manic Miner*, with all that pixel perfect nonsense thrown in. What more can I say – if you like this sort of thing, then I guess *Blagger* is probably your kind of game.**

Credit where it's due, there's a certainly a lot going on in each of the 20 varied screens of platforming jollity on offer here. If you really want to know, the 'hero', Roger The Dodger, is a tough safe robbing kind of a chap, whose endless nightly toil seems to consist of cracking the safes in strange and otherworldly buildings. He goes about this by first grabbing several securely secreted keys and then heading for the safe, cunningly located on every screen – but one cracked safe a night doesn't seem to slake his lust for kleptomania, so once Roger has raided one safe, it's on to the next, even more cunningly constructed building, to crack another.

Roger, though, is not alone on his nocturnal adventures. Each building has its own set of nightwatchmen patrolling the levels. These gentlemen are 'spooky and kooky' and they patrol their designated area of the screen in an unrelenting pattern, and should our (anti?) hero make contact with these beasts then he will be consumed. There are lots of other *Manic Miner*-inspired traps and obstacles to be overcome such as disappearing floors, electric prongs to be hurdled, moving walkways, the list goes on.

Given a little more spring to the Roger's step (play it and you will see what I mean) then *Blagger* might have made for an entertaining little platformer – if you like this kind of game that is… *

CLARANCE FRANK

GAMING'S BIGGEST DISASTERS





The games industry is full of success stories, but there are just as many games, consoles and peripherals that failed to do the business. Nick Thorpe and Darran Jones look at some of gaming's biggest disappointments

Think of failure in videogames and Nintendo's Virtual Boy is often the first thing that people think of. Despite its short lifespan and inability to reach Europe, gamers know that it was a failure for Nintendo, proving that even the touch of Gunpei Yokoi didn't always translate to commercial success.

But what are we really talking about when we use the term 'disaster'? Money (or lack of) is often a big clue to something's success and it should come as no surprise to learn that many of the systems, games and peripherals that we'll be covering here fall into that category. Companies like Philips spent millions flogging dead horses like the CDi, while the financial state of Atari is well documented.

Money is an easy way to determine a disaster but it's not always accurate. Look at *E.T.* and *Pac-Man*, two Atari 2600 games that sold well, but were universally panned. One of THQ's failings was that it put too much faith into its uDraw tablet and even a pink dildo-wielding Jason Rubin couldn't save it from financial ruin.

And let's not forget devices like the Super Scope, Power Glove and joysticks that are just too useless to use, making you question why anyone would consider inventing them in the first place. The same could be said for companies that thought it would be a great idea to mark a game's launch with the sacrificing of a goat, or humiliating an ally, which in turn led to one of the biggest blunders in gaming history.

Join us, then, as we highlight some of the many atrocities that have been caused in the last 40 years of gaming. And if you don't see your favourites included, write in to **retro.gamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk**, we'd love to hear from you.



KEY

- FINANCIAL
- TIMING
- UNHAPPY USERS
- BAD PRESS
- CRITICAL
- BROKEN
- BAD SALES

"Companies like Philips spent millions flogging dead horses like the CDi"

GAMING'S BIGGEST DISASTERS

PERIPHERALS

POWER GLOVE

MANUFACTURER Mattel **YEAR** 1989

Hardware failures don't really come any more iconic than the Power Glove. Designed by Abrams/Gentile Entertainment and manufactured by Mattel in North America, this motion-based controller for the Nintendo Entertainment System looked set to revolutionise the way we interacted with video games, but ended up in bargain bins shortly after its release. The magnitude of its dismal performance is matched only by the staggering amount of hype that preceded its launch. It famously featured in the 1989 movie *The Wizard* and ignited the dreams of millions of gamers, who blindly assumed that this peripheral would make them as skilled as the suave video game expert who brandished it. In the real world, it was inaccurate, awkward and disastrously under-supported. [redacted]





» The Power Glove may have looked futuristic, but it certainly wasn't fun to use and is best considered a bizzare curio piece now.



"The Power Glove utilised cheap technology and clever engineering to accomplish feats that, at the time, could only otherwise be accomplished with robotic tech costing upwards of $10,000," explains Adam Ward, part of the team behind Power Glove documentary *The Power Of Glove*, set for release this year. At the time, the peripheral was nothing short of revolutionary. "The Power Glove's precursor, the Data Glove, had been designed with clients like NASA in mind, so it was able to implement the latest and most expensive tech without concern for going over budget," continues Andrew Austin, who also worked on *The Power Of Glove*. "The Power Glove, on the other hand, was a peripheral that had to sell for under $100 in 1989, and despite that, it was able track your hand's position in 3D space, determine the tilt of your hand and sense your different fingers' bending motions in an impressively wide range." [redacted]

Despite the interest in the Power Glove and the technology that it utilised, the peripheral was not a success. Getting it to function with existing NES games was a cumbersome affair that involved tapping in a seemingly endless number of inputs on the controller's button pad, and the device required users to rig up a complex sensor array in order to pick up movement. Even when all of this was done, performance was erratic and many users simply gave up. To make matters worse, only two games – *Super Glove Ball* and *Bad Street Brawler* – were released that used the device specifically. "Since it had to be retroactively programmed to function with games that already existed, it would often underperform when compared to the NES controller, which was frustrating for gamers who bought the Glove thinking it would make them the masters of time and space," states Andrew.

Adam believes that the Power Glove's lack of success may even have put the games-playing public off the idea of motion control altogether – at least for a short time. "It could be accused of 'poisoning the well' for a lot of gesture-based videogaming projects for nearly 15 years," he admits. However, the irony is that the low cost of the Power Glove and its functionality could also be cited as reasons for the intense surge of interest in motion-



» The absurd location of the controller's actual control pad only complimented the poor and unreliable motion control.



"It could be accused of 'poisoning the well' for a lot of gesture-based videogaming projects"

Adam Ward

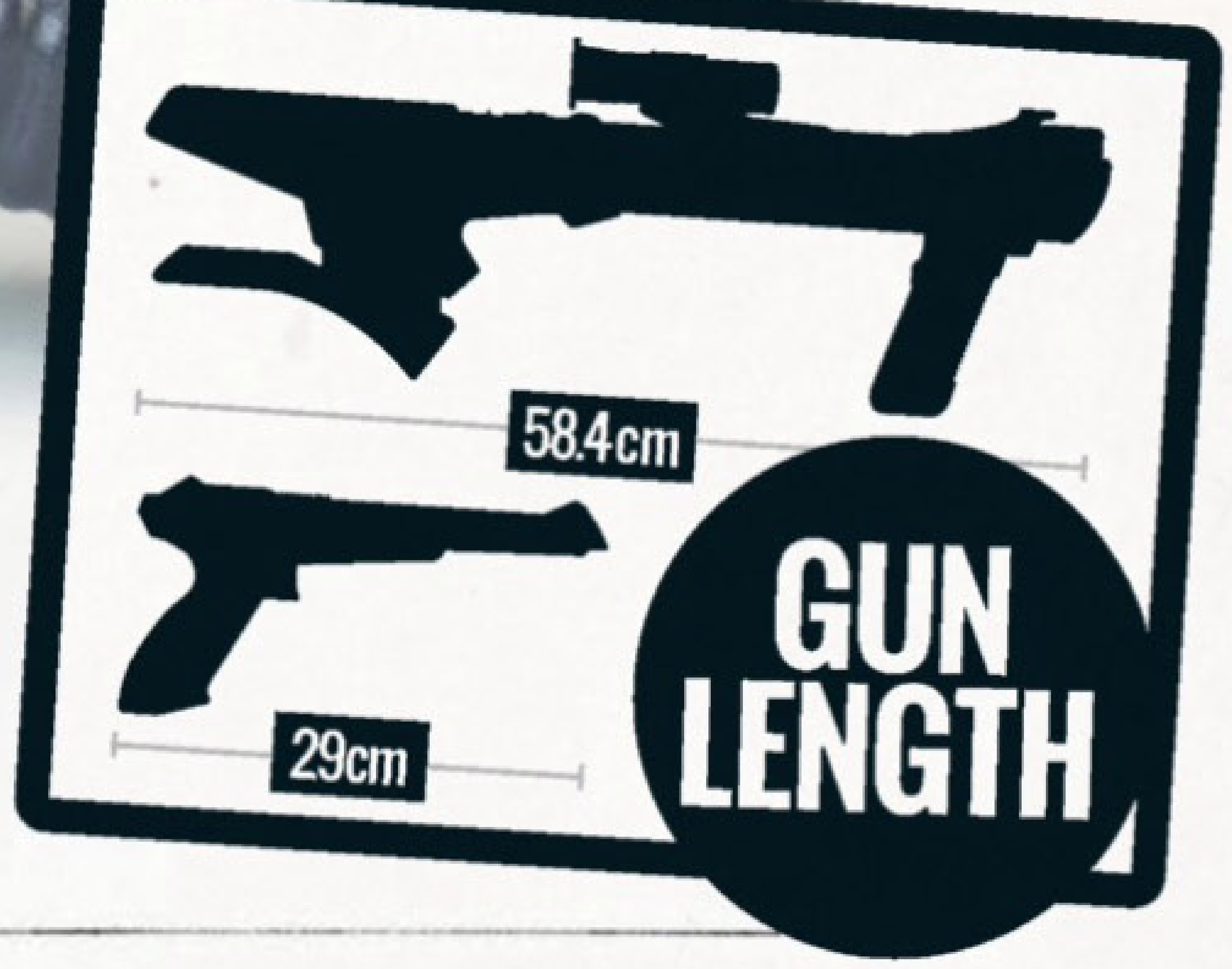


control from the hacking community, who tore it apart and utilised it in early VR experiments in the Nineties.

It's unusual that a device which flopped so dramatically and failed to fulfil its role should become such a legendary name in video gaming. Andrew believes that the Power Glove's fame is largely down to the fact that it personified an entire era. "The reason the Power Glove has become so iconic is really twofold," Andrew explains. "The first aspect is that the design and marketing has come to really embody the spirit of the Eighties. The Eighties were an era in which people looked to the future as something that would be big and bold – a future of strength and power. People latched onto the Power Glove because it was a representation of this strange alternate future where people zip around in Ferrari Testarossas and talk on cellphones the size of bricks. Another aspect is that the Power Glove also represents a sincere form of optimism, something which gamers can still relate to. It showcased a vision of humans reaching out and interacting with games and computers with just the flick of our hands. Despite not living up to its own hype, the Power Glove was still one step closer to bringing us to a reality in which we can explore virtual worlds. When we see that companies like Oculus VR are still exploring similar dreams, it is no wonder that the Power Glove has come to represent a prophetic vision for the future," Andrew concludes.



» It may have stood apart from other lightguns, but the large size made Nintendo's peripheral unwieldy to use.



SUPER SCOPE

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **YEAR** 1992

Lightguns have been a staple accessory since the introduction of home consoles. As such, by the late Eighties every console manufacturer offered one: Atari's XG-1, Sega's Light Phaser and Nintendo's NES Zapper. Nintendo's offering had been particularly popular, forming a key part of many console bundles alongside its most fondly-remembered title, *Duck Hunt*. However, by the early Nineties no major console manufacturer had introduced a lightgun for its console.

Nintendo was the first to market with its Super Scope, a lightgun unlike any that had been seen before. For a start, instead of tethering the player to the console with a cable, the Super Scope was a wireless lightgun which relied on an infrared signal to communicate with the SNES. Additionally, where previous lightguns had been shaped like pistols or rifles, the Super Scope was designed like a bazooka with a shoulder rest and top-mounted fire button. The Super Scope debuted in North America with a bundled six-game cartridge, at a price of $59.99. [redacted] The Super Scope's unique design features were its undoing. The bazooka-style design ensured that the Super Scope was much larger than existing lightguns, and the placement of the fire button on top of the device was awkward for fast-paced games. Worse yet, the wireless design meant that it required six batteries to operate, adding a long-term cost to ownership.

The Verdict

The Super Scope probably wasn't a financial disaster for Nintendo and it did push Sega into sinking money into the Menacer as a response. For players, though, the Super Scope was an unwieldy beast and even those that enjoyed it were left with little to play, with only eight dedicated gun games following its release and a couple more offering bonus support.



Q&A STE PICKFORD

We pick the brains behind one of the few Super Scope classics

Why do you think Nintendo went for a bazooka design?

No idea to be honest, I guess they just thought it was cool. I remember thinking it looked good at the time, if a bit silly. Nintendo has always been in the plastic toy business, so perhaps it's not such an odd design for them really.

Why do you think so few developers created games for it?

The same reason why nobody ever makes games for peripherals: unless the peripheral maker pays them to. Making a game for a gaming peripheral limits your market to only those who have bought the peripheral, and it also makes it difficult to convert the game to other platforms.

Why did you make *Tin Star* compatible with the device?

Contractual obligation! Nintendo hired us to make a Super Scope game for them. Third parties weren't particularly making games for it, so Nintendo had to make one or two games itself. We'd just finished *Ken Griffey Major League Baseball* for Nintendo, which was a success in every respect. We really should have got the contract to make the sequel, but due to behind-the-scenes politics that went to Rare instead, and I think Nintendo felt a bit guilty and so it gave us a contract to make a Super Scope game as a sort of consolation prize.

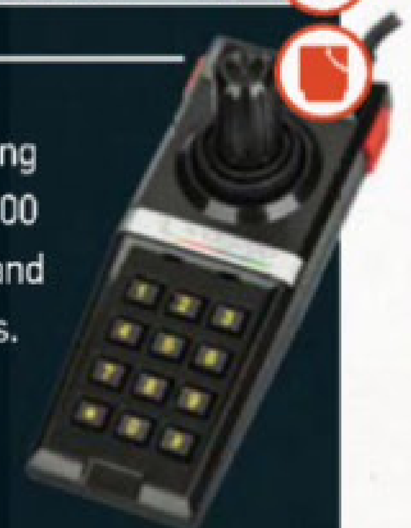
The great thing about the project was that nobody at Nintendo was especially interested in it. It didn't matter to anyone, it was just a tick box Super Scope title. That meant we had more freedom than usual to design and make the game we wanted, so we got away with quite a radical art style and a really funny script, while also against anyone's expectations, making it a really good game.

LOSING CONTROL

Four controllers that weren't fun to use

ATARI 5200 CONTROLLER

■ Atari ■ 1982



Atari broke the general convention of self-centring joysticks, making the 5200 controller a pain to use and earning the ire of players. Worse yet, the device was prone to breaking down prematurely.

EXPORT SATURN CONTROLLER

■ Sega ■ 1995



Sega's redesign of the standard Saturn pad for Western audiences turned a classic design into a bulky mess, failing the 'If It Ain't Broke, Don't Fix It' test rather spectacularly.

JOGCON

■ Namco ■ 1998



This PlayStation controller featured an integrated force-feedback wheel that might have seemed like a relatively good idea at the time, but its users generally preferred Namco's older NeGcon controller, plus the Jogcon is only compatible with two games.

MASTER SYSTEM CONTROL STICK

■ Sega ■ 1987

We've never been quite sure why Sega, as one of the world's foremost arcade manufacturers, would release a backwards arcade stick that only Ned Flanders' Leftorium would want to stock.





ROB

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **YEAR** 1985

An appealing little robot, bundled with the NES Deluxe Set in order to play games with physical pieces.

THE VERDICT: As far as Nintendo is concerned, ROB was a massive success. Its inclusion in high-end NES bundles was basically a Trojan Horse technique which allowed the company to market the system as an electronic toy, rather than a videogames console – a product then seen as toxic by North American retailers. However, the lack of long-term support for ROB has become legendary amongst gamers as the two games that accompanied ROB at launch, *Stack-Up* and *Gyromite*, were the only ones ever made. The coolest thing in the box sadly looks rather less cool when covered in a thick layer of dust…

MIKRO-PLUS

MANUFACTURER Mikro-Gen **YEAR** 1985

This Spectrum add-on contained a 16K shadow ROM and a joystick port, which Mikro-Gen claimed would give a new dimension to depth of gameplay, with 50% bigger and better games.

THE VERDICT: Trailed for months with ads that showed no game content, the Mikro-Plus promised big things but delivered underwhelming results. *Shadow Of The Unicorn* was the first (and only) game to use it and scored well with the press, but was recognised as nothing groundbreaking. However, thanks to a high price of £14.95 and WH Smith's decision not to stock the game it didn't come near recouping Mikro-Gen's £130,000 investment, and plans for other Mikro-Plus games were cancelled. We can't blame anyone but Mikro-Gen for this one – the lessons were there to be learned from Imagine and *Bandersnatch*.



© Mark R Jones



CHARACTERISTICKS

MANUFACTURER Cheetah **YEAR** 1992

A line of joysticks for a variety of computer and console platforms, modelled on popular TV and film properties such as *The Simpsons*, *Batman* and *Alien*.

THE VERDICT: It's worth applauding Cheetah for trying something innovative in marketing controllers – a relatively un-sexy area of hardware. They seemed to have sold through a fair few of these, too, judging by the fact that they're not too hard to find online. Unfortunately, using any of the designs was an unpleasant experience due to the fact that they were created for marketing rather than comfort. We have to single out the *Alien* model as one of the least comfortable joysticks ever made.

E-READER

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **YEAR** 2001

A card scanner for the GBA, letting the machine to read data in the form of dot patterns. NES games, add-ons and more were distributed this way.

THE VERDICT: While it was popular in Japan, audiences elsewhere were rather less taken with it. Each strip of dots holds only 2.2KB of data, meaning that even small games spanned multiple cards. If you wanted to transfer add-on data to a game, such as the extra levels for *Super Mario Advance 4*, you needed an additional GBA and a link cable. The device was discontinued after a couple of years in North America, and never actually made it to Europe at all.

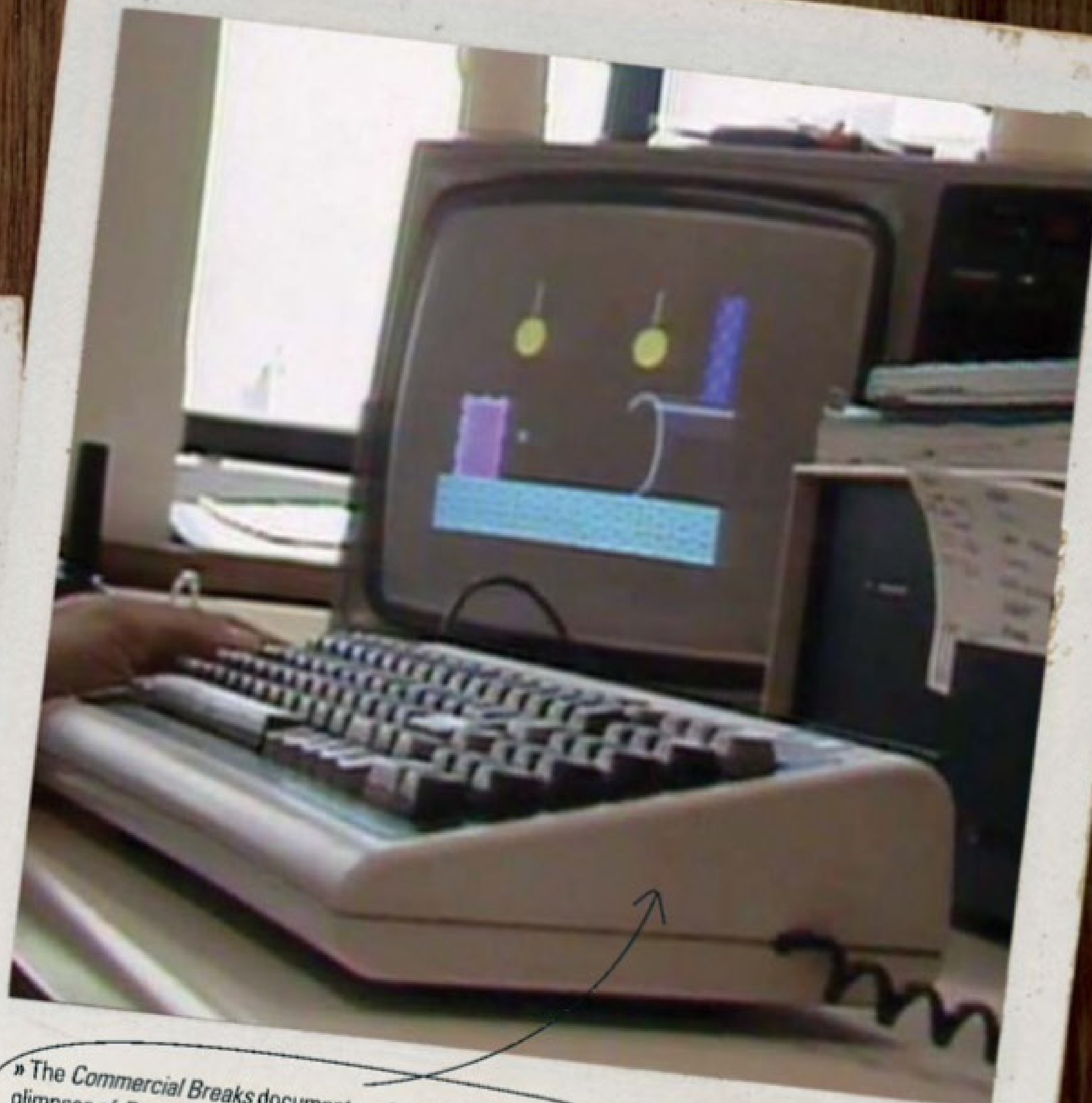




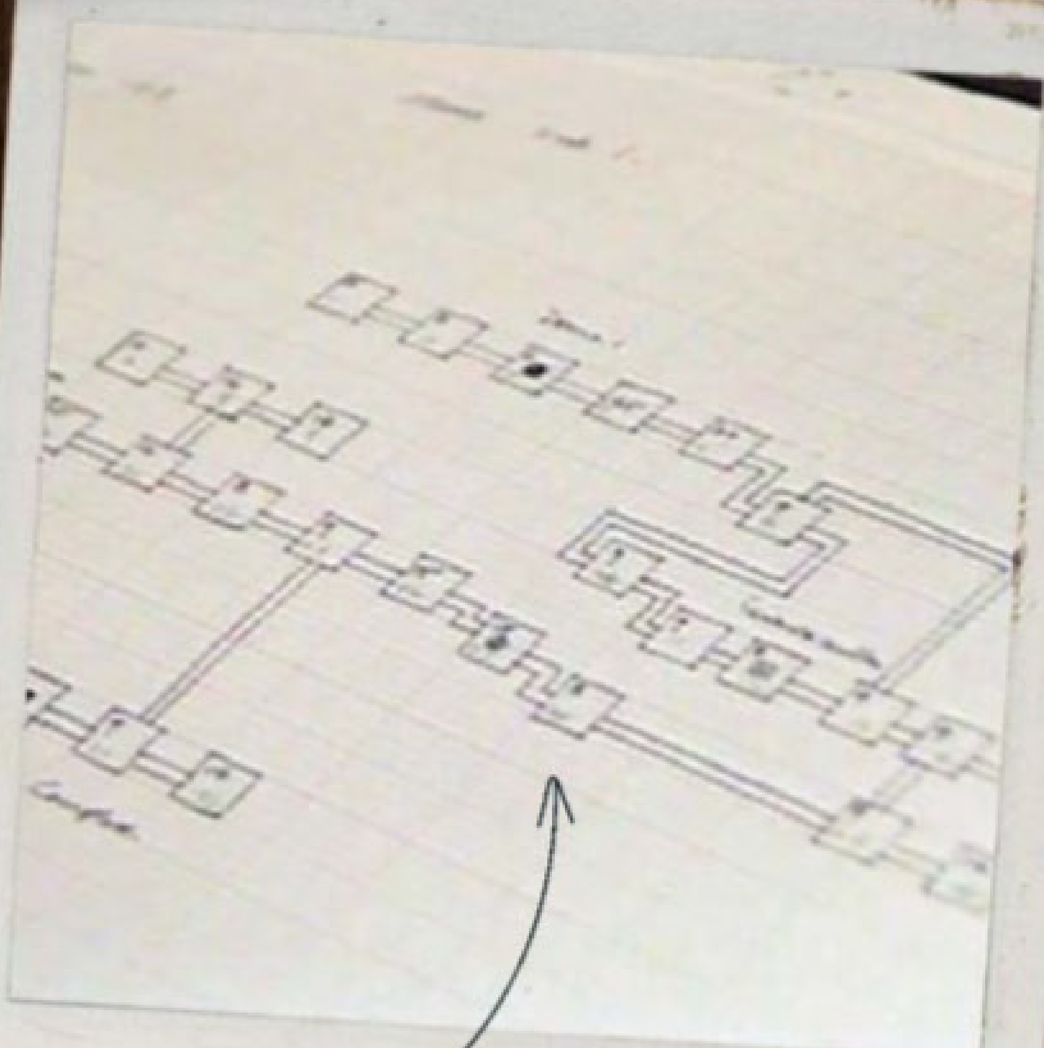
» John Gibson working on *Bandersnatch* using a Sage IV development system.



» A mock-up of the *Bandersnatch* box, which was to hold numerous goodies as pioneered by Infocom.

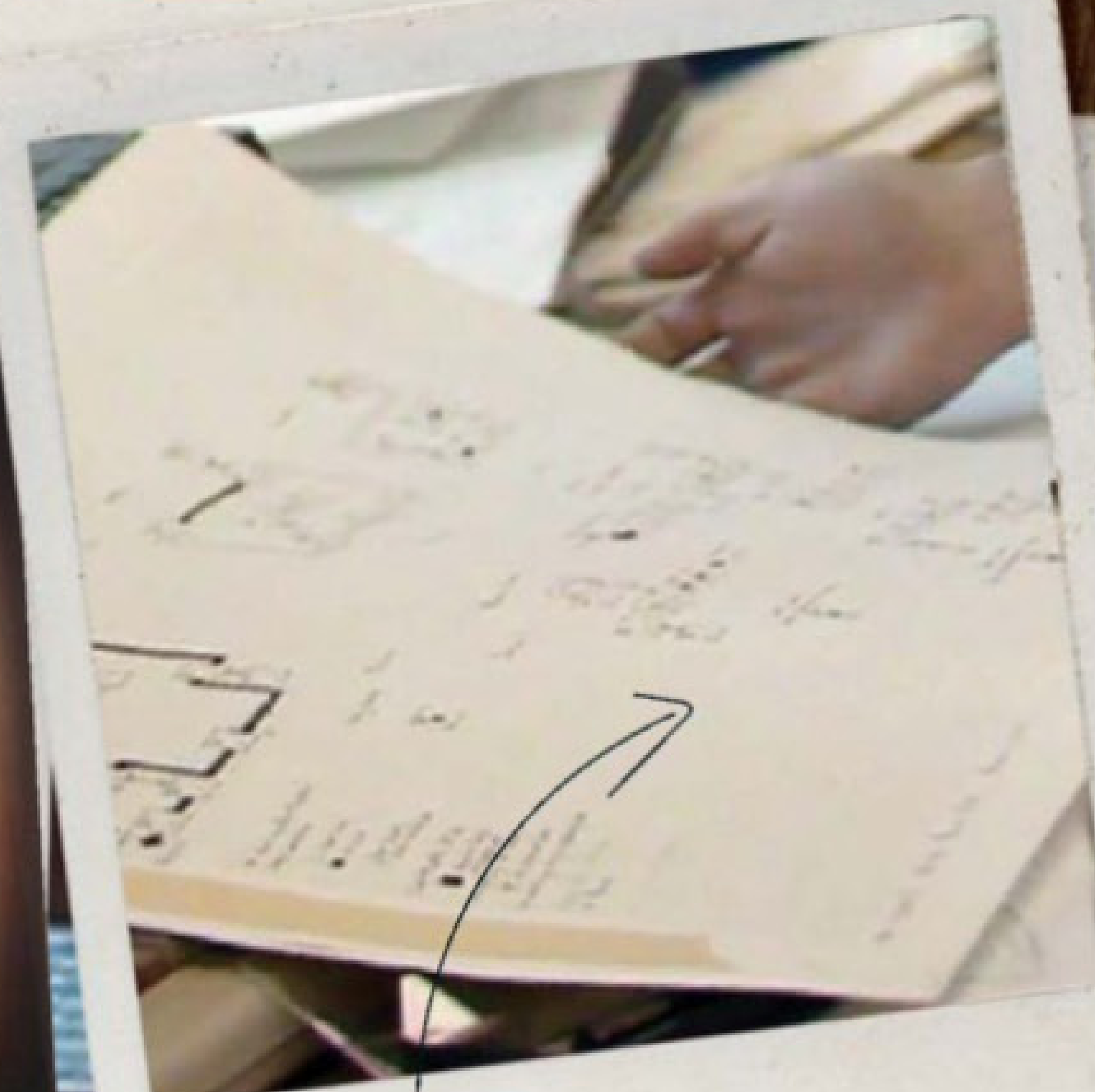


» The *Commercial Breaks* documentary features several tantalising glimpses of *Bandersnatch* in development. The sprites were certainly big compared to other Spectrum games of the day.



» These *Bandersnatch* map designs hint at an extensive game world.

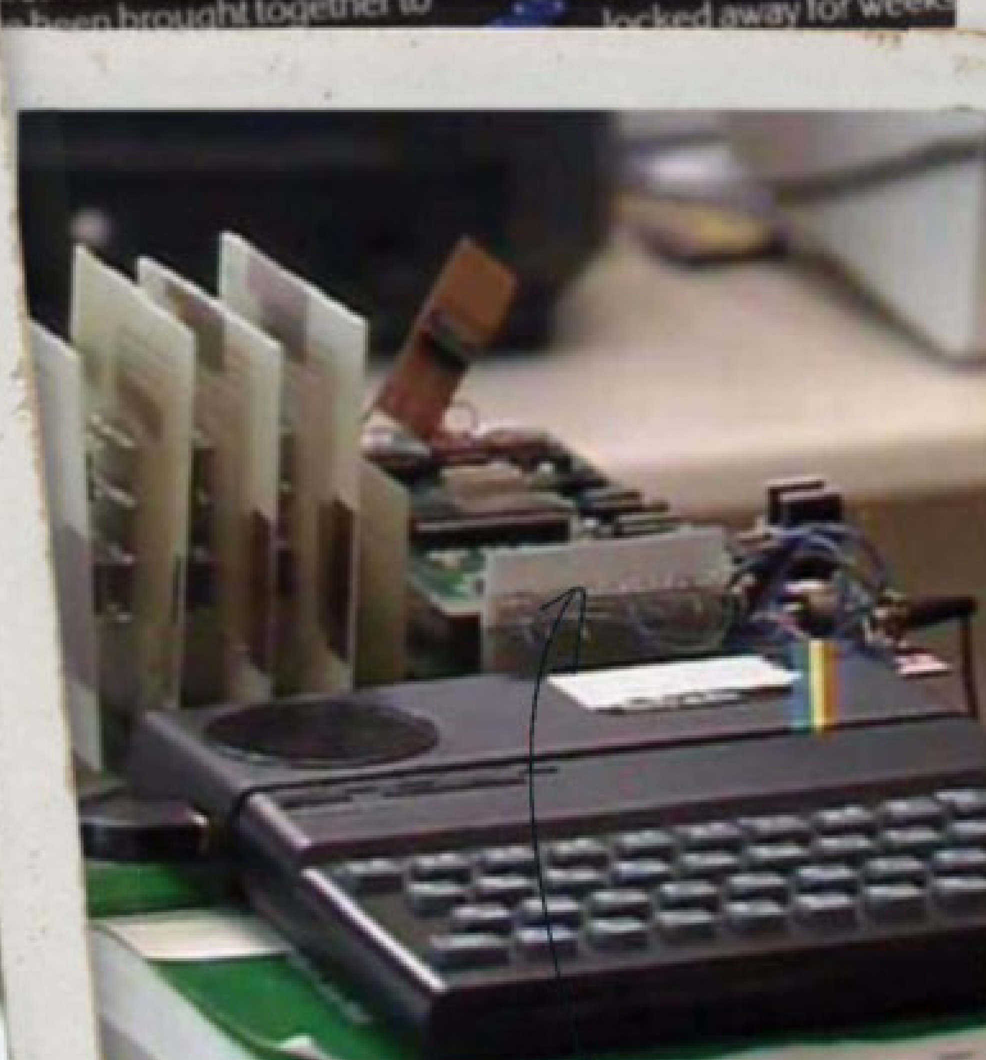




» Sadly, *Bandersnatch*'s ambition turned into disaster for Imagine.



» One of the increasingly tense Imagine board meetings, where the company's survival was pinned to the elusive Megagames



» The prototype of the Megagame add-on which was to hold 64K of ROM for graphics data.



» A forlorn Bruce Everiss presides over the deserted Imagine offices in the company's final days.

THE MEGAGAMES

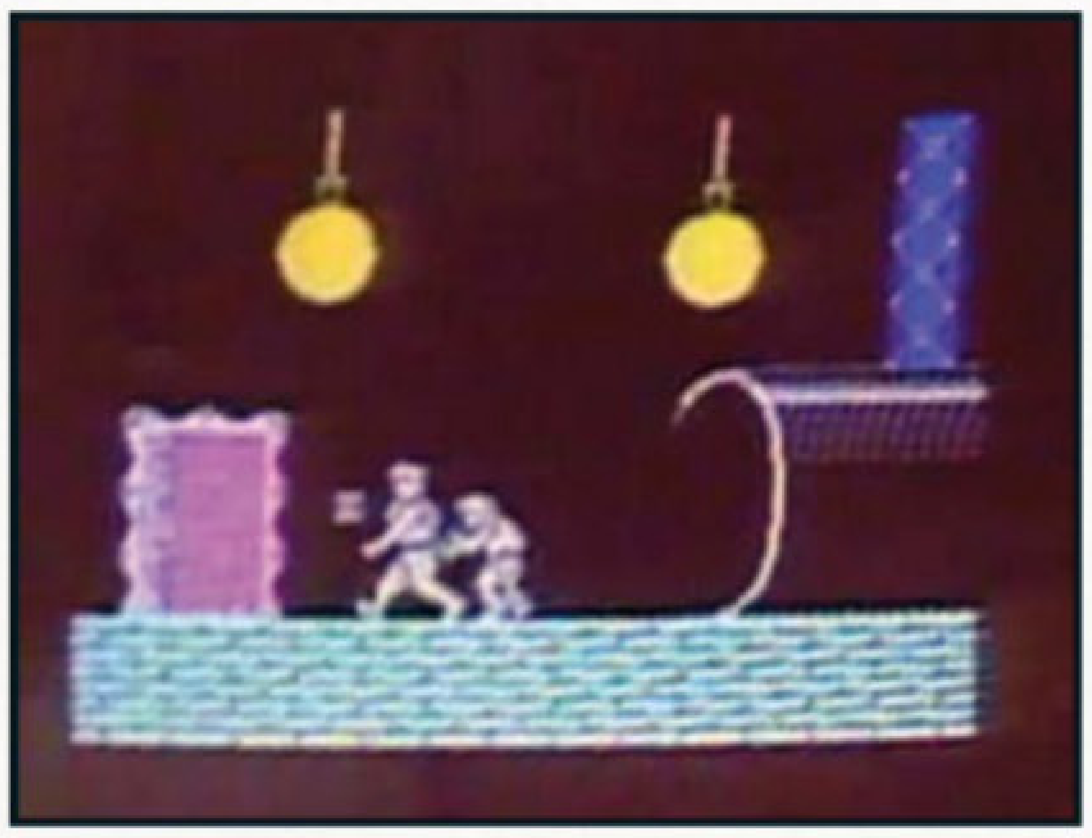
Imagine Software said it would revolutionise the gaming experience but its spectacular failure brought the whole company crashing down. Paul Drury asks whatever happened to the Megagames?

For gamers of a certain age, mentioning *Bandersnatch* and *Psyclapse*, the two so called 'Megagames' for the Spectrum and Commodore 64 respectively, will bring a wry smile. Those enigmatic adverts in the gaming press, the boasts that all other games would become obsolete overnight, the talk of a mysterious add-on with unparalleled power, the unbridled hype and the very public meltdown of Imagine on national television; it was all so very Eighties. So who first suggested this wildly ambitious and ultimately ill-fated adventure?

"It was my idea!" Bruce Everiss, one of the Directors at Imagine, declares in an unassuming fashion. "We weren't trying to do a Megagame though, we were trying to beat piracy. My background was in commercial computing and back then, when people bought software packages, they cost hundreds of pounds. To protect them from being copied, they came with these things called 'dongles', which plugged into the back of the machine and the software would check it was there before it would run." [redacted]

Bruce suggested a similar approach for the [redacted] Spectrum, a peripheral with a few resistors and capacitors which would plug into the serial port of the micro. He then, almost casually, added that this dongle could also include an extra 16K of RAM, an idea that captured the imagination of the company's co-founder, David Lawson. "As far as I can tell, my idea changed into putting a lot of extra RAM on an add-on," continues Bruce, "which needed a custom chip to switch it in and out through a method called 'paging'."

"I remember the artists started drawing these giant worms," confirms John Gibson, the main programmer for *Bandersnatch*. "Remember the film, *Dune*? They came from that, and Ally [Noble] drew these enormous sprites. We'd got a system to handle them



albeit at only 10 frames-per-second. I remember doing code so you'd encounter a worm in a maze, though I don't know if the worm would eat you or give you information, if it was to be a goodie or a baddie!" [redacted]

We'll never know which way the worm was to turn as the game never progressed much beyond the prototype stage. John explains that his fellow coder on *Bandersnatch*, Ian Weatherburn, who tragically took his own life in 1989, was working on a speech bubble system, allowing dialogue to pop up whenever you met someone in one of the many planned locations. "We never got as far as the text meaning something sensible, though," notes John. "It was nowhere near a game. It only got as far as a graphics extravaganza."

Progress on the sister project, *Psyclapse*, was even less advanced. Coder Eugene Evans confirms this was to come with hardware containing extra ROM to store graphics data, but the game, which was to feature warriors drawn from across the universe battling it out on a mysterious planet, didn't get past the planning stage. However, lack of playable code didn't stop Imagine mercilessly hyping the games and advertising them prominently in the magazines of the day. With no screenshots to use, Bruce and his marketing team had to get creative. They produced a series of minimal ads, featuring just the titles of the Megagames on a plain white background with some of the letters hinting at the game's content, and others that placed the programming team centre stage, mullets and all. [redacted]

As expectations rose, so did the proposed price. First £30 was mooted, with some at Imagine suggesting they might have to charge £60 to cover the cost of manufacturing the add-on, far in excess of the £5.50 Imagine typically charged for its games. "There was nothing wrong with the price," Bruce assures us. "As well as the game, you'd get a shirt, a cap, badges and lots of goodies, things that were cheap to make but add a lot of value. You could wear the T-shirt on the day of release, saying I've got it, you haven't!"

Of course, no-one got to wear the T-shirt. Imagine was declared bankrupt in the summer of 1984, the arrival of the bailiffs memorably captured on camera by Paul Anderson's film crew as part of the *Commercial Breaks* documentary (see RG98 for Paul's recollections), and the Megagames disappeared forever. Well, almost. John and several other key members of the *Bandersnatch* team formed Denton Designs and their first game, *Gift From The Gods*, was powered by the same engine and featured numerous ideas taken directly from *Bandersnatch*, including a maze, tunnels and skulls filled with worms. Even the speech bubble system popped up in Dave Lawson's post-Imagine project *Brataccas*. [redacted]

"*Bandersnatch* has become one of those urban myths," chuckles John. "As the years go by, stories get passed round and things get exaggerated. I wouldn't be at all surprised if someone, somewhere said it was going to be full of naked women!"

So even if the Megagames were a failure, at least they did it with style. "It was a fascinating idea to make the Spectrum do far more than Sir Clive had ever intended," muses Bruce. "We wound up the gaming community for months and then there was the huge failure. It was almost Shakespearean, wasn't it?"

Thanks to Anthony and Nicola Caulfield at www.frombedroomstobillions.com for permission to use stills from their documentary, and the Ocean Software Facebook page and www.gamesthatwerent.com for additional photos.

ASK EVANS
Eugene Evans on the allure of the Megagames

"The Megagames were a brave, bold, big idea," says Eugene Evans, *Psyclapse* coder and erstwhile tabloid darling. "Many of the things we had in mind for these graphic adventures didn't become the norm for years. Speech balloons for conversations, rich character interactions and big explorable worlds occupied by large interesting characters. Of course, ideas are cheap, actually making them work is the challenge." Eugene acknowledges that though they had a working prototype of the add-on for the C64 and had produced some large sprites for the game, *Psyclapse* was never much more than an ambitious concept (see RG109 for more of his memories) and is thus pleasantly surprised at the enduring interest in these most famous of gaming failures. "Perhaps it says more about the job we did hyping them! Would we have ever met people's expectations? Who knows. I think people were excited at the possibilities and filled in the blanks themselves. Who am I to ruin the nostalgia."





Q&A
JOHN ROMERO

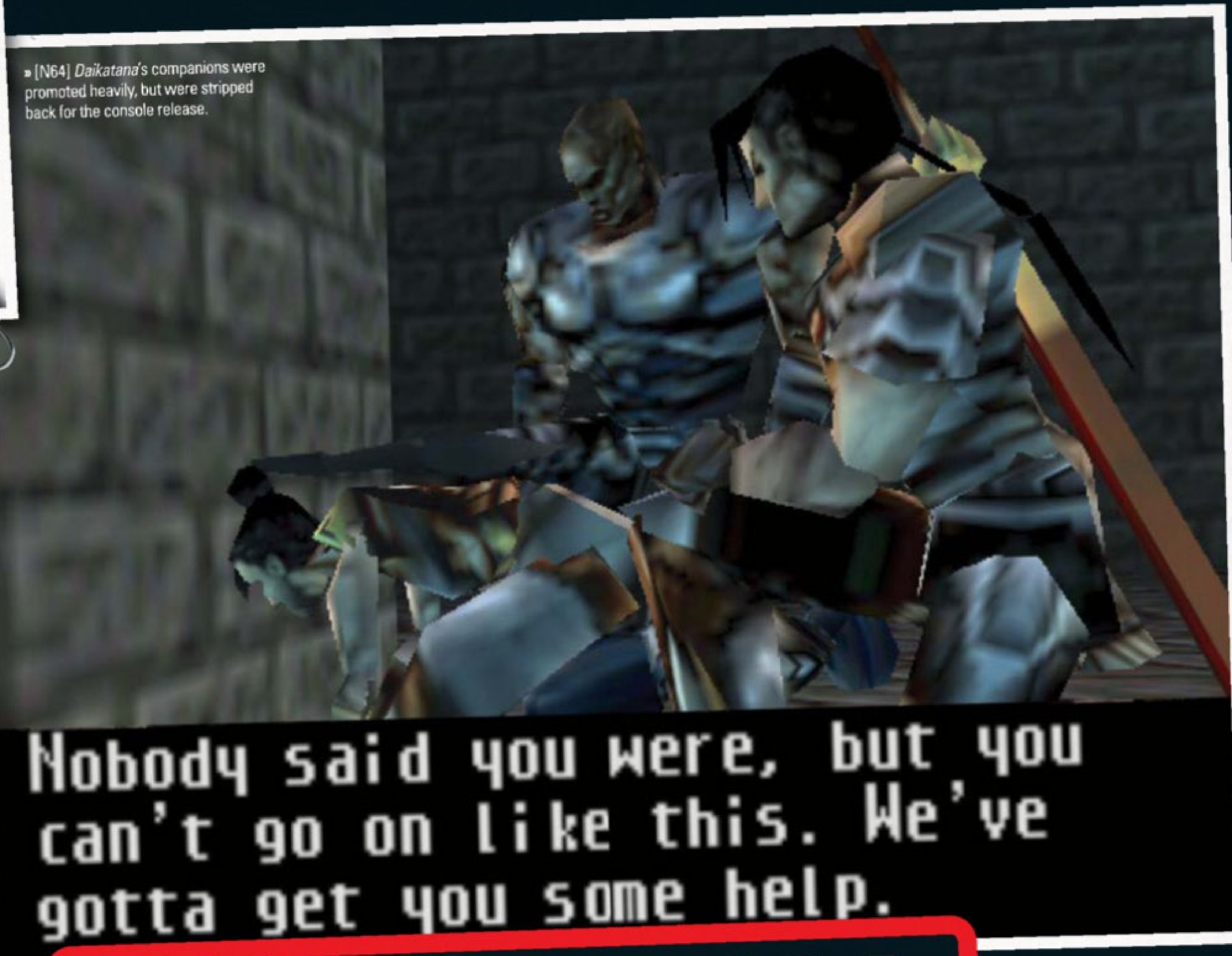
The creator dredges up the past

Do you agree with the harsh reviews that *Daikatana* received at the time?
No, the press really attacked the game because of Ion Storm's image ads run in 1997, then the 'Bitch ad' that followed, and the game took three years to make but it was advertised the year it was started. A major mistake of mine was to hire an entire team of passionate modders, really great people, who had never made a game before in their lives. It was a big experiment that blew up on me.

Whose idea was it to have the 'Romero's about to make you his bitch' line?
I'm sure you'll be surprised at this one. On the *Quake* packaging project was a woman named Sasha Shor who designed all the packaging, CD printing, the *Quake* Font, ads, you name it. When I started Ion Storm I naturally wanted to keep working with her so we signed up with her company, Industry Media. Mike Wilson wanted her to be really edgy and one of the ad concepts she came up with was the Bitch ad. Yes, a woman created the Bitch ad. Mike showed me the ad and I told him I would never say something like that. He said it didn't matter and that it was edgy and he wanted to run with it. Bad judgment on my part.

What were the biggest problems you faced from a technical point of view?
The biggest tech problem on *Daikatana* was that we were waiting for the delivery of the *Quake II* source code to be released to us in early 1998, and all our code would have to be refactored into the new engine. It turned out to be a much, much bigger task than we estimated. But really, the problems we had making *Daikatana* were people problems. Technology wasn't really an issue.

In hindsight what would you have done differently with the development?
I would have started Ion Storm with just Tom Hall and me. Everything else would have happened differently. It was a huge lesson for me, and I'm surprised that 15 years after *Daikatana*'s release that people still remember it as if it's still a big deal. For years now the only mail and messages that I have gotten about *Daikatana* are from players that still absolutely love the game.



» [N64] *Daikatana*'s companions were promoted heavily, but were stripped back for the console release.

DAIKATANA

MANUFACTURER Kemco **YEAR** 2000

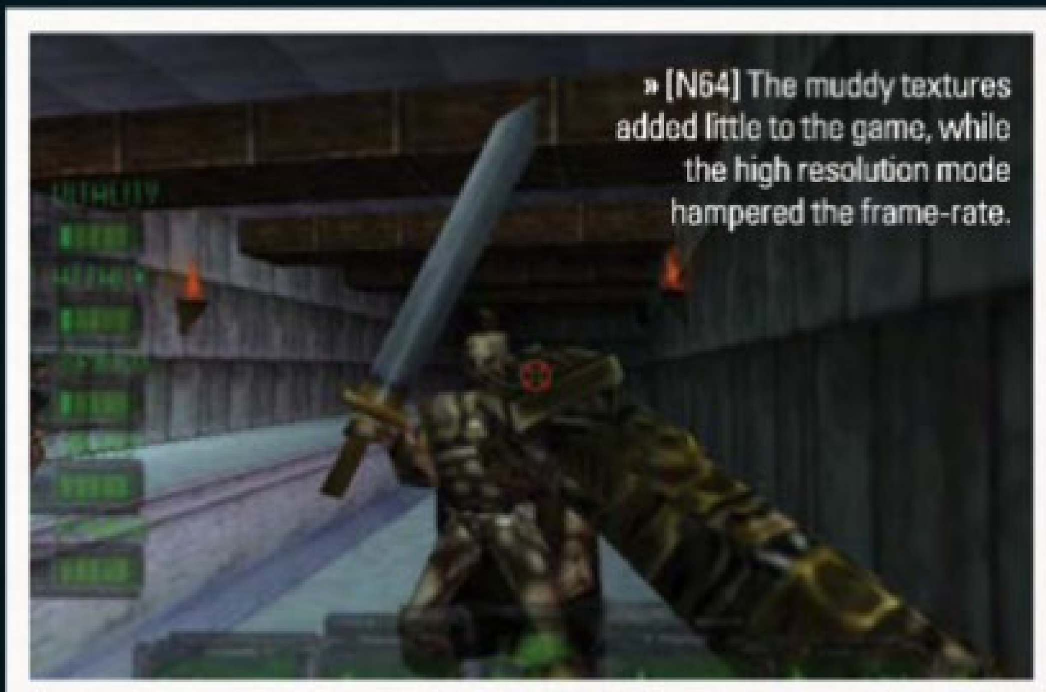
Great things were expected of Daikatana. Wait, not just great things, *impossible* things.

After all, it was being created by John Romero, a talented coder who had found fame at id Software and was riding high on the success of *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Doom*, and the recently released *Quake*. What could possibly go wrong? Is *Daikatana* one of the worst games ever made? No, of course not, but it is easy to see why it has been so reviled over the years, particularly the Nintendo 64 version, which feels like a seriously cut down version of the original PC game.

Like many high profile games, *Daikatana* quickly became a victim of its own hype. It was heavily promoted by John Romero, who had recently left id Software and wanted to tell the world about his exciting new project. Gamers were excited about *Daikatana* and understandably so, but numerous delays began to cost the game dearly. A controversial ad that stated 'John Romero's about to make you his bitch' did little to fuel the patience of gamers, and by the time Ion Storm received the *Quake II* engine, it realised it was falling further behind. Numerous E3 showings did little to convince the gaming press, and when *Daikatana* was eventually released (some three years after its original release date) it received numerous negative reviews, particularly on the N64.

Daikatana's uninteresting level design, weak AI and ugly visuals are clear indicators of the game's overall quality, but it's also filled with plenty of interesting, if poorly executed, ideas. There was a significant amount of hype about your main character's AI companions during development, but while they made the eventual PC release, they were cut completely from the N64 version, only appearing in cutscenes. Add in fiddly controls, sloppy presentation (try looking at what it says when you invert the controls) and large amounts of fogging and it is little wonder that the N64 version was so poorly received.

Luckily, the Game Boy Color version of *Daikatana* was given a complete overhaul and is essentially a top-down dungeon crawler. Styled on the likes of *Zelda*, it's a highly enjoyable little adventure games that's certainly worth exploring if you've never heard of it before.


» [N64] The muddy textures added little to the game, while the high resolution mode hampered the frame-rate.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

MANUFACTURER Sega **YEAR** 2006



Sega's first attempt at a seventh generation *Sonic* game introduced Silver The Hedgehog, some mild bestiality and arguably the worst 3D outing for the popular mascot to date. [redacted]

THE VERDICT: Resident *Sonic* fan Nick Thorpe has completed *Shadow The Hedgehog* 11 times but he's never managed to stomach finishing Sonic's first HD game. "Putting aside the bizarre creative direction that had Sonic kissing a human princess, the game just wasn't finished and has hundreds of bugs to show for it," he says. He's right as well, as *Sonic The Hedgehog* is a dire mess of a game and arguably the low point of the series so far. Glitchy visuals; horrible controls; a terribly erratic camera; numerous bugs and a terrible new character in the form of Silver will ensure it remains hated for some time to come. [redacted]

RISE OF THE ROBOTS

MANUFACTURER Time Warner **YEAR** 1994

Mirage's game was going to redefine the beat-'em-up genre and even featured a soundtrack by Queen's Brian May. Can you guess what actually happened? [redacted]

THE VERDICT: Aside from its impressive pre-rendered visuals there is nothing good about *Rise Of The Robots*. It features everything you hate to see in beat-'em-ups, including generic characters, stilted animation, an over reliance on a single move, dodgy collision detection and woeful, unchallenging AI. "It was not the most pressured project I have worked on," artist Sean Naden told us in issue 43. "Ironically, this was largely due to lack of experience within the overall team. Time Warner should have been kicking our arses, but we were left to our own devices."



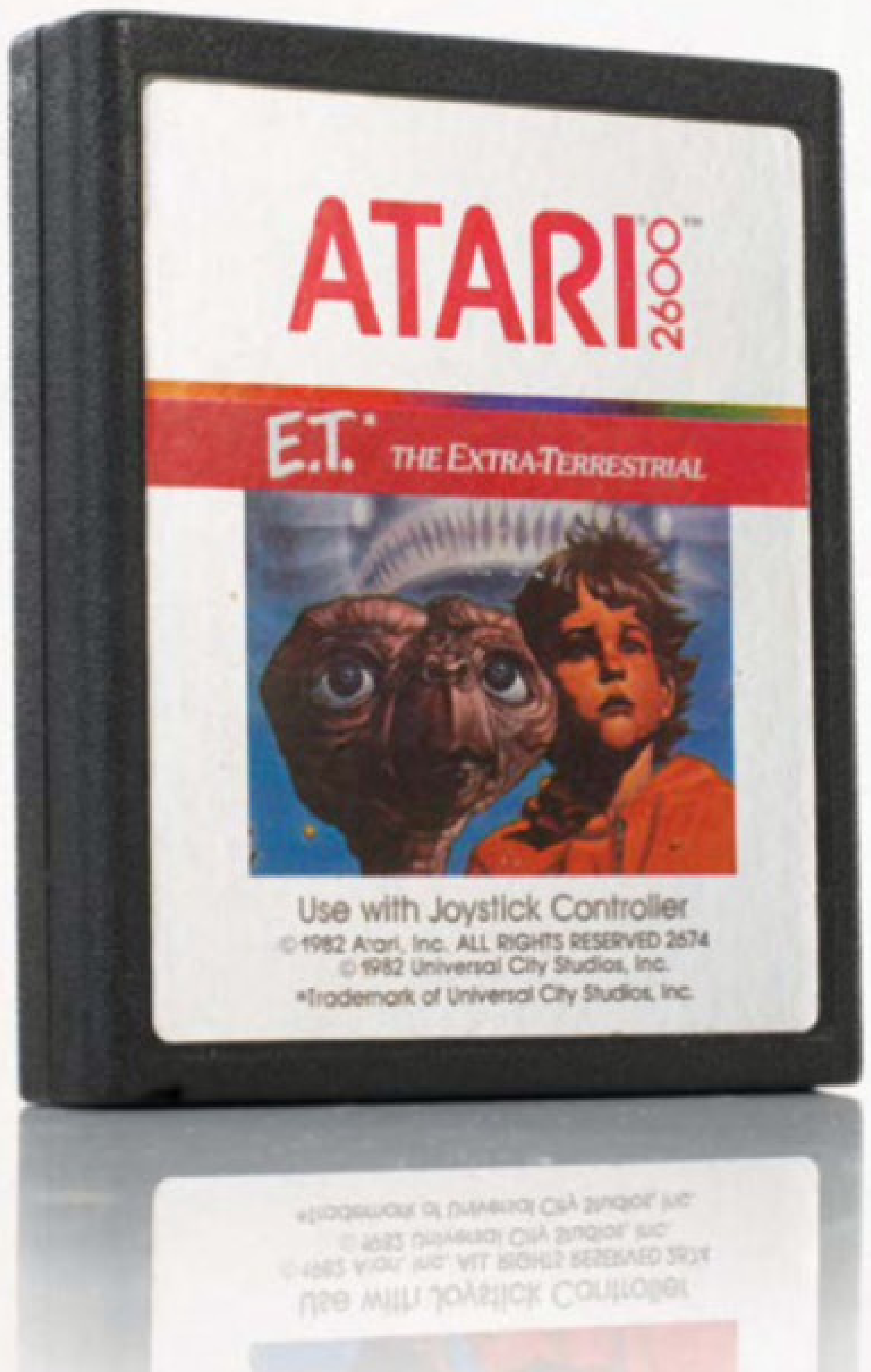
ZELDA CDI GAMES

MANUFACTURER Philips Media **YEAR** 1993



Nintendo's made a great many *Zelda* games, but you won't find them proudly displayed on Nintendo UK's *Legend Of Zelda* hub. There's a valid reason why… [redacted]

THE VERDICT: *Zelda* fans have little love for Nintendo's *Zelda* CDi releases. There's no denying that they are poor games compared to the rest of the series, due to their poor controls, poorly structured level design and overall pacing, but aesthetically they're rather pleasing. "We had been aware of the criticism following the release of the games," creator Dale DeSharone admitted to us in issue 27. "I can understand that people were disappointed. Given the time we had, I thought we did a good job." [redacted]



E.T. THE EXTRA TERRESTRIAL

MANUFACTURER Atari Inc **YEAR** 1982

Everyone knows the story of *E.T.* as it's one of gaming's most famous urban legends and was recently the subject of a Microsoft documentary. Is its tale of woe deserved though? [redacted]

THE VERDICT: The odds were always stacked against Howard Scott Warshaw's game. The talented coder was given just under six weeks to complete a game that would tie in with the incredibly popular movie. The end game, while poor, is nowhere near as bad as many will have you believe, and it managed to sell over 1.5 million copies, an impressive figure until you realise that Atari had ordered 4 million units. As with *Pac-Man* (which just missed our list) Atari had overestimated the popularity of Warshaw's game.

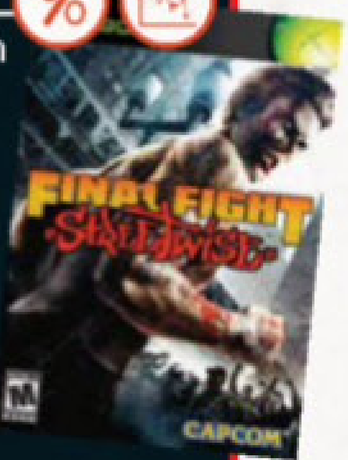
[redacted] "From a developer's standpoint it does not deserve a bad [redacted] rep, Howard tells us. "I stand stridently by *E.T.* as the best five-week game ever done for the VCS." [redacted]

DON'T FORGET THESE

More games that are best avoided

FINAL FIGHT STREETWISE

■ Capcom ■ 2006



Created by an internal American team at Capcom, *Streetwise* was a woeful attempt to bring the classic 2D series into the third dimension. We're still raw just thinking about it. Even the mini-games are crap.

DARK CASTLE

■ Electronic Arts ■ 1991



While the original Mac version was decent enough, the Mega Drive offering is a real atrocity, with hideous visuals and terribly clunky controls. An astonishingly bad game.

SUPERMAN 64

■ Titus Software ■ 1999



One of the N64's worst games with a Game Rankings aggregate score of 22.90%. Terrible visuals, monotonous gameplay, unresponsive flying controls and numerous bugs all kill it.

BUBSY 3D

■ Accolade ■ 1996



To think this garbage actually came out *after Super Mario 64*. Ugly graphics, an awful camera and twitchy controls all combine to create a stinker.

WORLD CUP CARNIVAL

■ U.S. Gold ■ 1986

It may have featured a big box and nice extras, but this cynical release from 1986 was simply a repackaged version of the terribly received *World Cup Football*.



© Mark R Jones



EYES

■ The fatigue associated with playing the Virtual Boy can be partially alleviated by setting focus and interpupillary distance correctly. Even so, all games offer an auto-pause function to protect users' eyes.

RUBBER EYED

■ While essential to experience the full effect of Virtual Boy games, the rubber eye shroud makes playing the system a uniquely anti-social experience, fully excluding the possibility of any spectators.

GAMES RELEASED BY DATE

NUMBER OF GAMES RELEASED

5 4 3 2 1

1995 > JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER, NOVEMBER, DECEMBER, 1996 > JANUARY, FEBRUARY, FEBRUARY

TWO D-PAD OR NOT TWO D-PAD

■ The Virtual Boy controller offers two D-pads. This was intended to allow the player to move in 3D space, but was more commonly used to flip controls for left-handed players.

STAND BY ME

■ The system's stand sits at a fixed height and only offers an adjustment for tilt. Even when sitting at a desk, many users must hunch uncomfortably to get their face into position.

BATTERIES

■ The Virtual Boy is powered by six AA batteries, which are kept in the control pad. This increased the size and weight of the controller, further discouraging long play sessions.

VIRTUAL BOY

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **YEAR** 1995

During the early Nineties, there was a widespread belief amongst console manufacturers that the next big technological shift for videogames would be away from traditional television displays, and towards virtual reality devices. Sega and Atari worked on headsets for the Mega Drive and Jaguar respectively, but their efforts failed to progress beyond the prototype stage. Nintendo, on the other hand, was able to release its device. Designed by Nintendo R&D1 under the supervision of Game Boy inventor Gunpei Yokoi, the device took the form of a headset which Nintendo promised would draw players into "their own private universe." [redacted]

■ The internal technology of the Virtual Boy was relatively clever, generating a convincing 3D image with a single LED row and an oscillating mirror for each eye. However, only red LEDs were used due to cost concerns – meaning that the device could only display red on black. Games were driven by a custom version of the NEC V810, a 32-bit CPU which also powered NEC's PC-FX home console, which granted considerable 2D power but limited ability to work with the type of 3D games which were becoming popular in arcades and on newer consoles. [redacted]

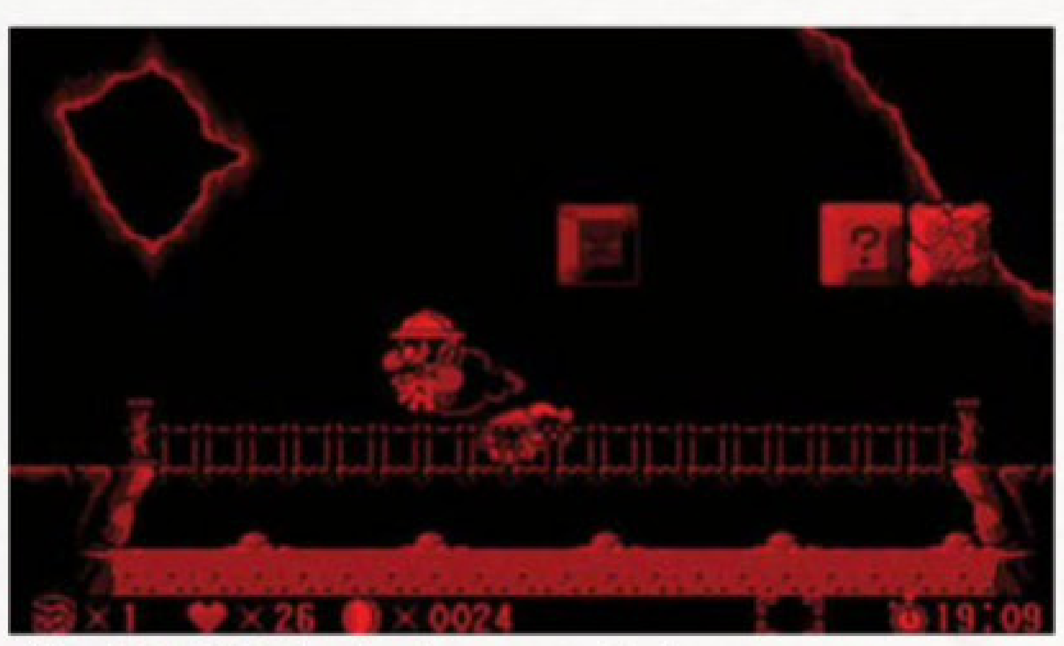
■ The Virtual Boy launched on July 21st 1995 in Japan, and a few weeks later on August 14th in North America, and enjoyed a unique market position – too large and fragile to be considered portable, but able to operate anywhere thanks to its built-in display and ability to use batteries. The price point was similarly ambiguous, with the system launching at $180 in North America – more expensive than 16-bit consoles and existing handhelds, but less expensive than the recently launched Saturn and the forthcoming PlayStation. *Mario's Tennis, Galactic Pinball, Red Alarm, Teleroboxer* and *Panic Bomber* accompanied the Japanese launch, while North American audiences got the same minus *Panic Bomber.* [redacted]

■ Nintendo faced enormous difficulties in marketing the Virtual Boy, in part due to the fact that its unique 3D visuals were impossible to display via print and TV advertising. The company advertised heavily with NBC and made a rental deal with Blockbuster in an attempt to combat this, which generated 750,000 rentals in the USA but failed to sell many players on the device. It's not hard to see why – the console's best games were possible in 2D. Worse yet, the device was physically awkward, causing players to report eye pain, and headaches and even feelings of sickness. [redacted]

> **"The device was physically awkward, causing many players to report eye pain"**
> The Virtual Boy was far from perfect...

The Verdict

The Virtual Boy was an unmitigated disaster for both Nintendo and players. Nintendo had sold only 770,000 units by March 1996, falling well short of its stated target of 3 million hardware sales. The machine was quietly killed as a result, with only 22 games released for the machine. Ultimately, that was a fate it deserved. While some high quality games such as Virtual Boy *Wario Land* and *Galactic Pinball* are included in that number, even ardent defenders of the machine have little to play – and that's if they can even do so, as no machine can match the Virtual Boy's fearsome reputation for being physically uncomfortable to play.



» [Virtual Boy] *Wario Land* is a key reason to play the system – an excellent platformer exclusive to the Virtual Boy.



» [Virtual Boy] Games like *Teleroboxer* featured convincing 3D effects, but were similar experiences to existing 2D games.

MOBILE MISFORTUNE

Four handhelds that were doomed to failure

GAME.COM

■ Tiger Electronics ■ 1997



Despite its high-profile licences such as *Sonic The Hedgehog* and *Resident Evil*, the act of actually playing a Game.com is masochistic as the dreadful screen turns everything into a blurry mess. It admittedly had some nice ideas, including being able to go online and using a touchscreen, but it was still rubbish.

NEO GEO POCKET

■ SNK ■ 1998



SNK's powerful monochrome handheld might have had a decent chance to succeed, had it not launched against the popular Game Boy Color. The system was replaced by a colour successor within five months, making it an extremely short-lived console.

N-GAGE

■ Nokia ■ 2003



The Finnish mobile phone manufacturer correctly predicted that mobile phones would become a popular gaming platform. However, its own gaming phone was scuppered by a high price and a lack of quality exclusive games, as well as questionable design choices including the infamous decision to locate the speaker and microphone on the side of the device.

GIZMONDO

■ Tiger Telematics ■ 2005



Originally announced as the GameTrac, this handheld was intended to provide parents with peace of mind thanks to its GPS tracking function. The system was discontinued just 11 months after its launch when its high-spending manufacturer Tiger Telematics went bankrupt, amid allegations of criminal activity amongst some company executives.

JAGUAR

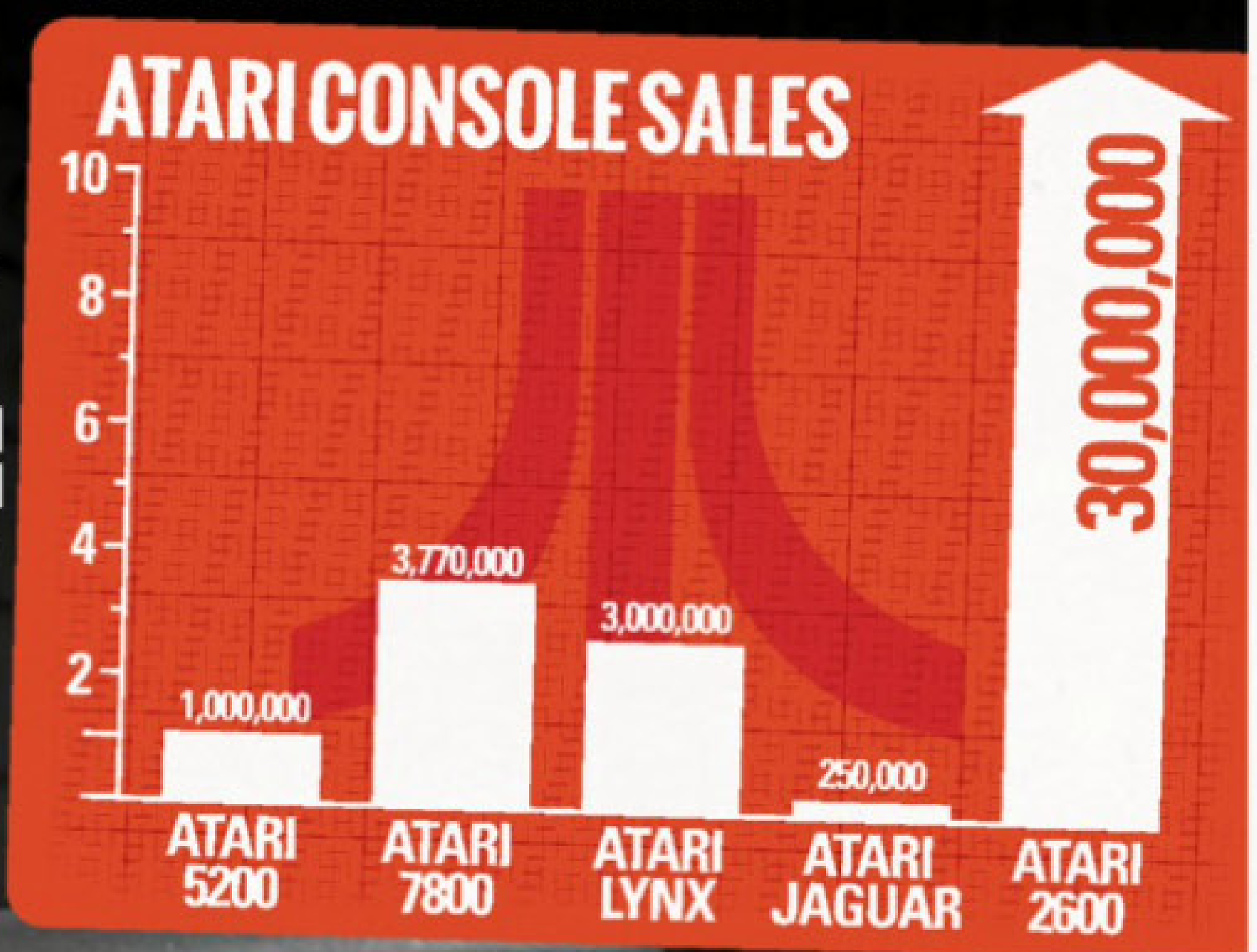
MANUFACTURER Atari **YEAR** 1993

Faced with the falling sales of its 7800 console during 1989, Atari was looking to release a new home console. However, the leader of the project had left the company and Atari sought the help of Flare Technology in order to finish the job. However, Flare's Martin Brennan argued that the existing project would soon be outdated as 3D graphics were the future, and that its Flare Two technology would be a better basis for a console as a result. Atari was convinced, and began the Jaguar project. [redacted]

[redacted] As work on the new console progressed through the early Nineties, Atari's existing Lynx handheld and ST computer range both experienced declining fortunes and were discontinued. Now rapidly shrinking, Atari had to go all-in on the Jaguar and launched the machine at a low price point of $249.99 while aggressively promoting it as the first ever 64-bit console, proudly comparing its specifications to those of competing consoles from Sega, Nintendo and 3DO. A soft launch began in late 1993 in New York and San Francisco, accompanied by the games, *Cybermorph* and *Trevor McFur In The Crescent Galaxy*. [redacted] Underwhelming launch [redacted] software dented the machine's reputation, but even if consumers were won over they would have struggled to buy one – supply problems stalled the Jaguar's progress until mid-1994. Meanwhile, many developers failed to utilise the machine's powerful hardware, instead porting existing 16-bit titles. The emergence of more powerful systems from Sega and Sony in late 1994 was the final nail in the coffin. [redacted]

The Verdict

While hardware bugs and supply problems played some part in the Jaguar's downfall, its biggest problem was the perception that it didn't have any good games. That's not true, as fans of *Tempest 2000* and *Alien Vs. Predator* will emphatically attest, but it certainly didn't have *enough* high-quality software – and that is a situation that Atari and Atari alone can be blamed for.







Q&A JEFF MINTER

The Tempest 2000 designer offers his thoughts on Atari's doomed final console

Why do you think Atari's Jaguar is so maligned by gamers?

I think many people feel that the system promised too much and delivered too little, which is true to an extent – the advertising was all full of shouting about 64-bits and 'do the math' and all that, but remember that was just the latest round of a kind of stupid spec-based marketing bollocks that had been employed throughout the previous console generation – remember those 'Blast Processing' claims from Sega?

What do you think Atari could have done for the console to fare better?

Well, for one they could have had better launch titles. What did they have, *Cybermorph* and *Trevor McFur In The Crescent Galaxy*? *Cybermorph* wasn't a terrible game, and it was a pretty good tech demo of pushing a decent amount of Gouraud-shaded polygons for each frame. *Trevor McFur* was a pretty good tech demo of the sprite subsystem of the Jaguar, but it just felt a bit rubbish to play. So what they had at launch were two games that were quite impressive tech demos but which weren't necessarily that great to play, and I think that may have hurt the launch a bit.

Also, bear in mind that this was Atari trying to stage a comeback against the Japanese consoles and they basically left all their big guns in that fight out of the battle. They still had the rights to some of gaming's most distinguished IPs and if they had launched with fantastic updated versions of, say, the likes of *Asteroids*, *Defender*, *Missile Command*, *Star Raiders*, *Battlezone* and such, then perhaps people might have thought 'hey, Atari is back!' and taken more notice of the launch and the system.

Having said all that I will always remember the Jaguar fondly, the hardware really was quite excellent for its time and I very much enjoyed working with it, and with the people who made it at Atari. Even if the system is considered a failure I will still remember those times as some of the best in my career.



GX4000

MANUFACTURER Amstrad **YEAR** 1990

The GX 4000 featured an expanded colour palette, hardware sprites and cartridge-based games. Sounds amazing right? Wrong. [redacted]

THE VERDICT: There's not much wrong with the GX4000 itself – the hardware could compete reasonably against the Master System and NES. Unfortunately for Amstrad, it didn't have the software to compete as an alternative to those machines when it launched in 1990, and wasn't powerful enough to compete with the Mega Drive. With only a meagre 15,000 consoles sold, it is easy to see that the Amstrad GX4000 was the wrong machine for its time. [redacted]

SAM COUPÉ

MANUFACTURER Miles Gordon Technology **YEAR** 1989



The SAM was designed to capture 8-bit users looking to upgrade, by beating the 16-bit computers on price.

THE VERDICT: While the idea behind the SAM Coupé was solid, the product couldn't deliver on its promises. Delays caused the machine to miss the Christmas sales season, and when users received it, they found that the Spectrum compatibility was patchy, with some users able to play only half of their collections. Additionally, while the SAM was capable of competing with 16-bit machines, the upgrades required pushed it closer to 16-bit computer prices.

VECTREX

MANUFACTURER General Consumer Electronics **YEAR** 1982



The Vetrex was the first console to feature a built-in vector display, enabling the machine to reproduce arcade games more accurately than its competitors. [redacted]

THE VERDICT: The Vectrex had the tools to succeed – good software, competitively priced hardware and a unique selling point. Unfortunately, the machine was launched into a market crash. Even Milton Bradley's acquisition of General Consumer Electronics couldn't save the it from a loss of faith in videogames amongst the American public.



32X

MANUFACTURER Sega **YEAR** 1994

Sega's second attempt to upgrade the Mega Drive, designed to provide users with a low-cost way to experience next-generation gaming and stymie any potential threat from the Jaguar and 3DO. [redacted]

THE VERDICT: While the 32X was an interesting idea, it was doomed to failure. Consumers were wary of Sega's upgrades following the disappointing Mega-CD, and the press quickly and correctly identified it as a stopgap before the PlayStation and Saturn. After an initial flurry of good games, quality software quickly dried up as developers shunned the machine in favour of the more powerful dedicated next-generation consoles. [redacted]

CD-i

■ Philips ■ 1991

Launching at the large asking price of $700 with a poor early games line-up hobbled the CD-i early on, but Philips continued until 1998 regardless, eventually losing close to a billion dollars on the project.



AMIGA 1200

■ Commodore ■ 1992

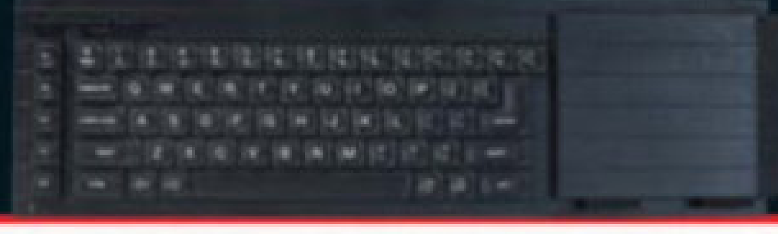
The final budget Amiga model suffered from a lethal combination of Commodore's misadventures and advances on other platforms. Escom rescued the machine from Commodore, but folded a year later.



SINCLAIR QL

■ Sinclair ■ 1984

Despite its advances over the Spectrum, the QL's deliberate non-gaming market position turned off existing Speccy owners, while the Microdrive cartridges turned both publishers and business users against it.



ACTION MAX

■ Worlds Of Wonder ■ 1987

What could be better than a console that required a VCR and could only play games that required a lightgun? The answer, as unhappy Action Max owners discovered, is pretty much anything else.



Retro Gamer

NINTENDO BACKSTABS SONY

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **YEAR** 1991



At the beginning of the Nineties, videogame companies were all exploring the exciting potential of CD-ROM technology and the exciting storage capacity that it offered. NEC had introduced a CD-ROM add-on for its popular PC Engine, while Sega and Nintendo were both investigating how to create similar add-ons for their own machines. Nintendo had chosen to partner with Sony for its own effort, with Nintendo producing an add-on device for the SNES and Sony manufacturing an all-in-one unit. However, Nintendo executives were a little unhappy with the proposed licensing structure for CD-ROM games and felt that they favoured Sony too heavily. At the Consumer Electronics Show in June 1991, Sony announced its combined unit under the name 'Play Station'. The very next day, Nintendo went up on stage and announced that it was instead entering into partnership with Sony's European rival, Philips.

Business deals collapse all the time, but this was a full-on betrayal. The very public nature of the announcement, combined with the lack of warning given over the move, infuriated Sony's management team, particularly its president, Norio Ohga. It was this sense of outrage that shielded Ken Kutaragi's project for a new 3D-capable console from fierce internal opposition within Sony, allowing it to see release as the PlayStation we all know today. Meanwhile, Nintendo had truly made a rod for its own back. Not only did its partnership with Philips yield little beyond some extremely dodgy CD-i games (including the aforementioned *Zelda* games), it directly provided the motivation for its own strongest competitor to enter the market – which must surely make this one of the worst business moves of all time.

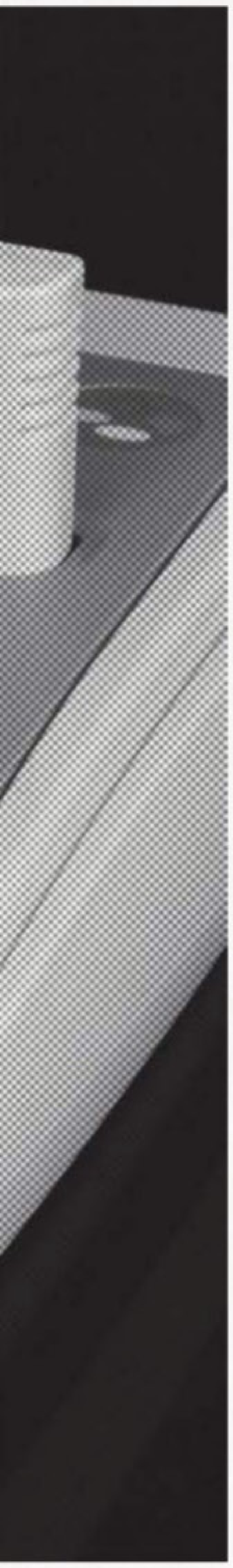
BAD HEADLINES

SEGA ADVERTISES VIRTUA RACING WITH "SCORE SOME SPEED FROM A DEALER NEAR YOU", 1994

CANNON FODDER UPSETS THE BRITISH LEGION AND VARIOUS NEWSPAPERS BY USING POPPY IMAGERY, 1993

COMMAND & CONQUER AD FEATURES HITLER, STALIN AND JACQUES CHIRAC AS "PREVIOUS HIGH SCORES", 1995

DREAMCAST AD BANNED FOR POTENTIAL TO ENCOURAGE ANTI-GERMAN VIOLENCE, 2000



SEGA'S SURPRISE SATURN LAUNCH

MANUFACTURER Sega **YEAR** 1995

The very first E3 show was a huge event, in part because of the imminent arrival of two huge consoles in September 1995 – Sega's Saturn and Sony's PlayStation. Sega's Hayao Nakayama had a plan to pull the rug from under its competitor by launching the Saturn early in North America. "I was kicking and screaming, forced to do this," recalled Tom Kalinske in a recent **Retro Gamer** interview. Tom was adamant that the shipment of consoles he'd received wasn't sufficient, but Nakayama urged him to pick a small selection of retailers and go ahead. As Tom explained, "the room erupted, but all the other retailers were annoyed that they didn't have it and of course, we didn't have any software for it." Sega had damaged its relationships with major retailers including KB Toys, which never stocked the Saturn, only to find that its much-coveted early adopters were nowhere to be found.





THE INTELLIVISION KEYBOARD COMPONENT

MANUFACTURER Mattel **YEAR** 1979

When the Intellivision was launched in 1979, Mattel Electronics was quick to provide a unique selling point over Atari's VCS – the Intellivision would soon be capable of full computing, thanks to the Keyboard Component. This add-on would offer a RAM upgrade, a second CPU, a cassette drive and more. The much-hyped add-on was too expensive and unreliable for general release, and this situation persisted for two years. By then, consumers that had bought the machine based on its future availability had become restless.

The result was that the USA's Federal Trade Commission began to investigate Mattel for fraud. A test failed to placate the regulator and in mid-1982, it fined Mattel $10,000 per day until the Component was released. It never was – but the less ambitious Entertainment Computer System designed to replace it launched in early 1983.

PROMOTIONAL TUNA CANS FOR ECCO THE DOLPHIN, 2001

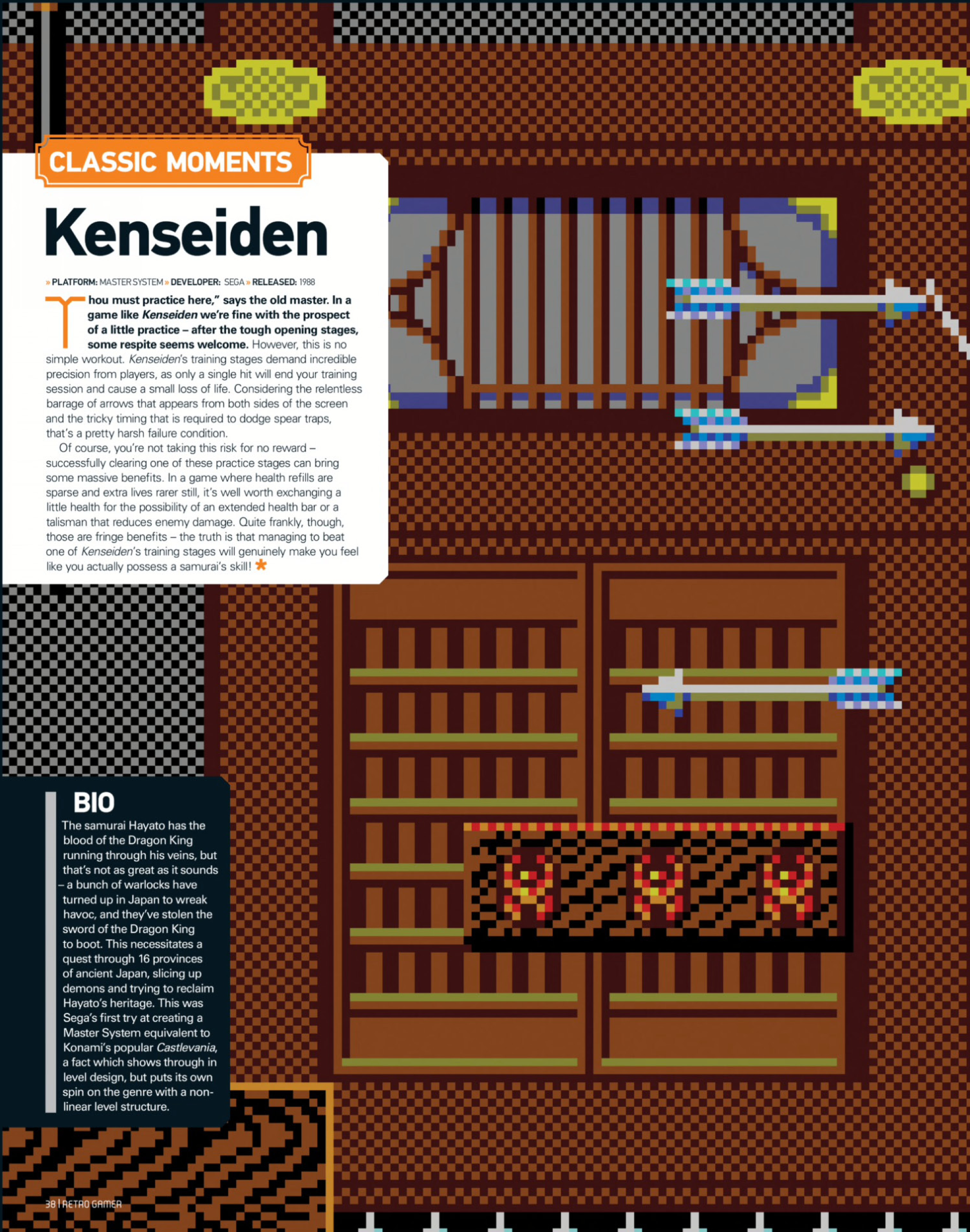
ACCLAIM PAYS FOR SPEEDING FINES TO PROMOTE BURNOUT 2: POINT OF IMPACT. CALL YOUR BABY TUROK FOR $10,000. SPONSORED GRAVESTONES FOR SHADOWMAN 2, 2002

SONY SENDS FAKE MEDICAL TEST RESULTS LETTERS, 1998

RACIST WHITE PSP BILLBOARD IN NETHERLANDS, 2006

SONY'S GOD OF WAR II LAUNCH, FEATURING SPECIAL GUEST DECAPITATED GOAT, 2007

Special thanks to Mark R. Jones, Kieren Hawken, nintendolife.com, Barry Barber, retrowarez.co.uk and Jason Kelk for supplying images and items for this article.



CLASSIC MOMENTS

Kenseiden

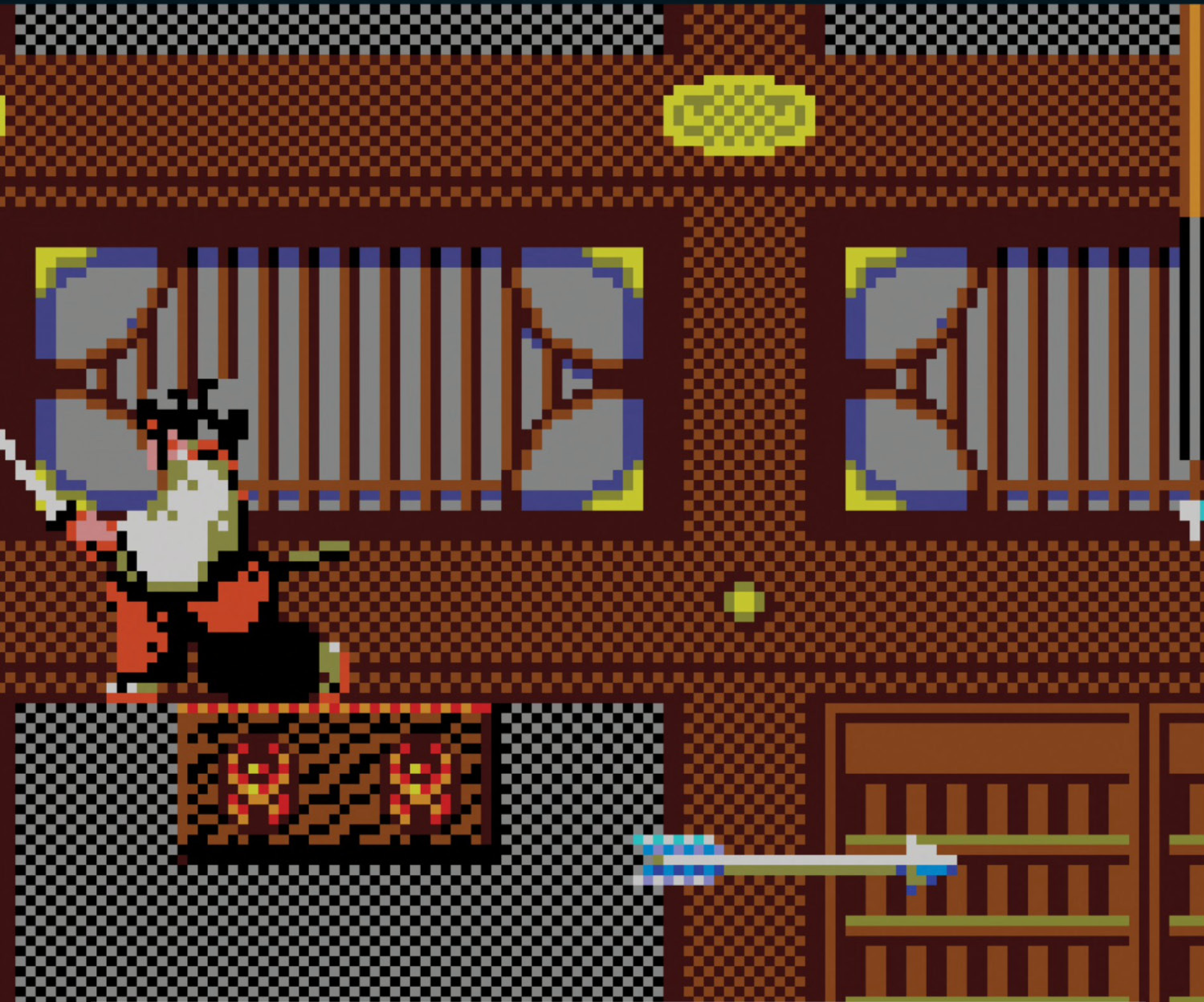
» **PLATFORM:** MASTER SYSTEM » **DEVELOPER:** SEGA » **RELEASED:** 1988

"Thou must practice here," says the old master. In a game like *Kenseiden* we're fine with the prospect of a little practice – after the tough opening stages, some respite seems welcome. However, this is no simple workout. *Kenseiden*'s training stages demand incredible precision from players, as only a single hit will end your training session and cause a small loss of life. Considering the relentless barrage of arrows that appears from both sides of the screen and the tricky timing that is required to dodge spear traps, that's a pretty harsh failure condition.

Of course, you're not taking this risk for no reward – successfully clearing one of these practice stages can bring some massive benefits. In a game where health refills are sparse and extra lives rarer still, it's well worth exchanging a little health for the possibility of an extended health bar or a talisman that reduces enemy damage. Quite frankly, though, those are fringe benefits – the truth is that managing to beat one of *Kenseiden*'s training stages will genuinely make you feel like you actually possess a samurai's skill! *

BIO

The samurai Hayato has the blood of the Dragon King running through his veins, but that's not as great as it sounds – a bunch of warlocks have turned up in Japan to wreak havoc, and they've stolen the sword of the Dragon King to boot. This necessitates a quest through 16 provinces of ancient Japan, slicing up demons and trying to reclaim Hayato's heritage. This was Sega's first try at creating a Master System equivalent to Konami's popular *Castlevania*, a fact which shows through in level design, but puts its own spin on the genre with a non-linear level structure.



MORE KENSEIDEN MOMENTS

Journey To The East

Kenseiden's non-linear structure allows players to make their way across the 16 provinces of 16th century Japan as they see fit, with a map screen appearing after each stage to offer a choice of route. Few stages are mandatory to play – it's your job to decide which upgrades are worth the risk of obtaining before you fight the final boss.



Freaky Creatures

Thanks to its Japanese setting, *Kenseiden* features many monsters that will be unfamiliar to Western audiences. Spiders, crows and skeletons are run of the mill horror beasts but here you'll be confronted with truly bizarre enemies, including fire-throwing demons, chain-flinging apparitions and our favourite – a lizard with a woman's head for a tail.



Lord Of The Sword

While *Kenseiden* does reward practice, it's an utterly brutal game and you're constantly under attack from enemies. It's vital to learn how best to utilise your sword as a result – being able to hold it while crouching is helpful, but powerful attacks gained from bosses such as this 'Helmet Splitting Sword' technique are the ones that really prove useful.



Giant Slaying

Benkei, the club-wielding warlock, is an absolute nightmare of a boss. He only seems to be vulnerable during specific frames of his walking animation, and can retaliate with an attack which drains a huge chunk of your health. The best approach is to swing your sword and immediately run – leading to that sweet moment of relief when you finally best him.



DRILLER

Free movement within a totally open first-person environment: it was the biggest challenge of Eighties game development. Graeme Mason speaks to two of the key men from Incentive Software, the company that took up that mantle…


FREESCAPE™

The revolutionary new system designed and developed by Major Developments, the in-house programming & design team of Incentive Software Limited. Freescape represents many thousands of man hours committed to bringing this great advance-ment in realism to your computer screen. For the first time, your can explore a solid, three-dimensional environment with complete freedom of movement. You can move to any point in 3-dimensional space and then look in any direction and see the view as if you were actually there.

The full perspective of the alien environment, complex gameplay and vast detailed landscape contribute to the uniquely absorbing atmosphere of 'Driller'. We hope you enjoy the experience.

Oh, and good luck!

Ian Andrew
(Publisher)

» The manual contained an introduction from its creator itself, Ian Andrew.

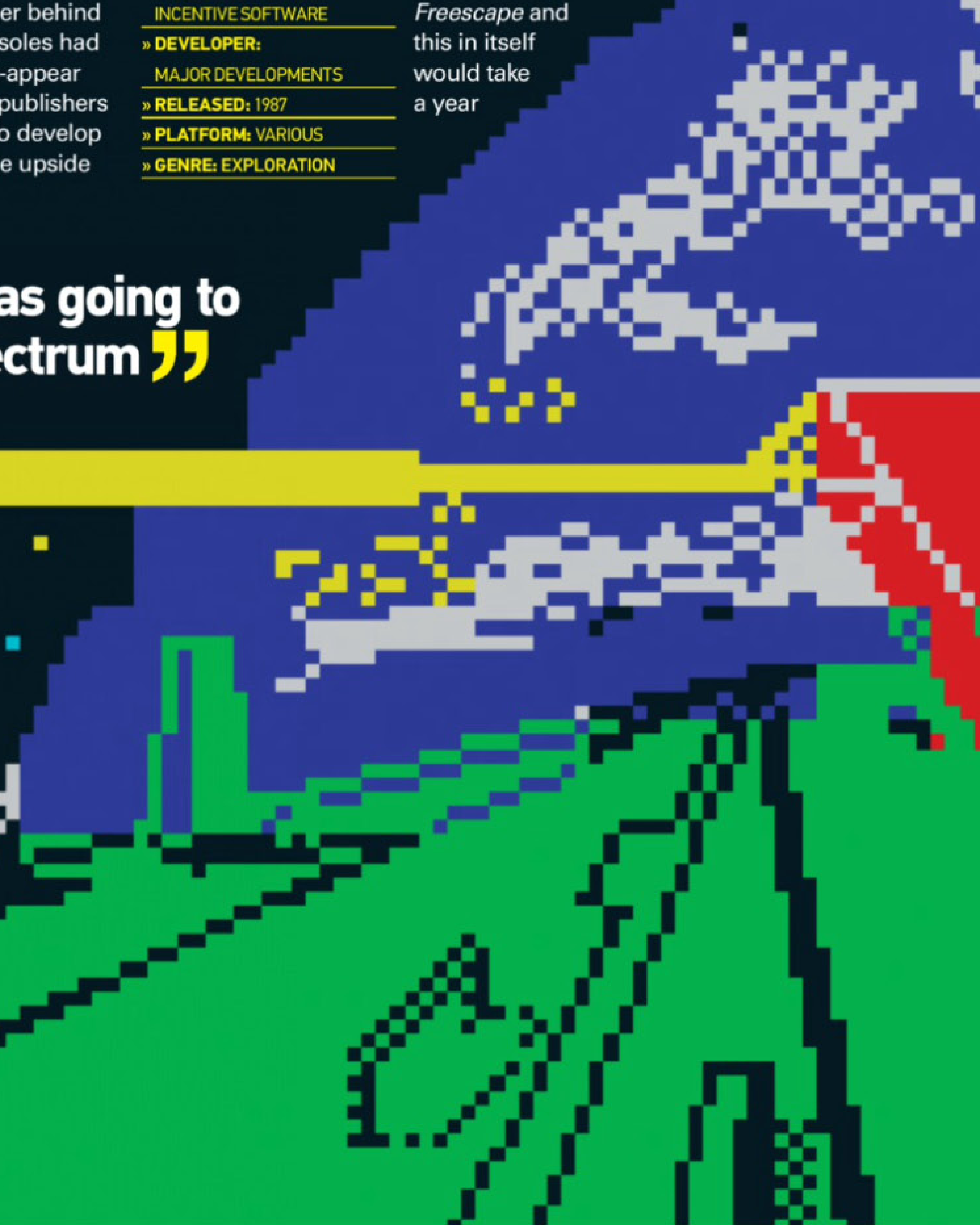
Like many software houses, Incentive found itself in a difficult situation by the time the second half of the Eighties had arrived. Thanks to rivals such as Elite, Ocean and US Gold, arcade conversions and movie licences had begun to dominate the software charts. Incentive had always prided itself on fresh ideas; it had created one of the very first arcade conversions, *Moon Cresta*; published the RPG-adventure mash-up, *The Ket Trilogy*; used an innovative cover for *Splat!*; and produced the popular utility, The Graphic Adventure Creator. But it was fast becoming clear that fresh ideas were not enough. Publishers needed licences, or a mind-blowing concept that no one had tried before. "Incentive was at a crossroads," says Ian Andrew, founder of the company and the main designer behind *Driller*. "Consoles had started to re-appear and several publishers had begun to develop for them. The upside was the potential volumes; the downside was the loss of control and financial commitments to the console manufacturers."

After several years of shoot-'em-ups and platform games, gamers were itching for creations that stretched the 8-bit computers and gave them new variants of gameplay. 3D had long been a tagline used to sell games, and vector graphics (or wire-frame) were common, with developer Realtime Software having even created shaded vector sprites for *Starstrike 2*. Yet free movement within a totally solid environment, in essence what we would today call a first-person shooter, was still assumed to be unattainable on the 8-bit computers. "I identified solid real-time 3D as I called it, to be our way forward," continues Ian, "and we started by getting the engine working the way we wanted." Incentive dubbed its engine *Freescape* and this in itself would take a year

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** INCENTIVE SOFTWARE
- **» DEVELOPER:** MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS
- **» RELEASED:** 1987
- **» PLATFORM:** VARIOUS
- **» GENRE:** EXPLORATION

> **"I mainly wondered how the hell I was going to get the game working on the ZX Spectrum"**
> Chris Andrew on the task ahead of him

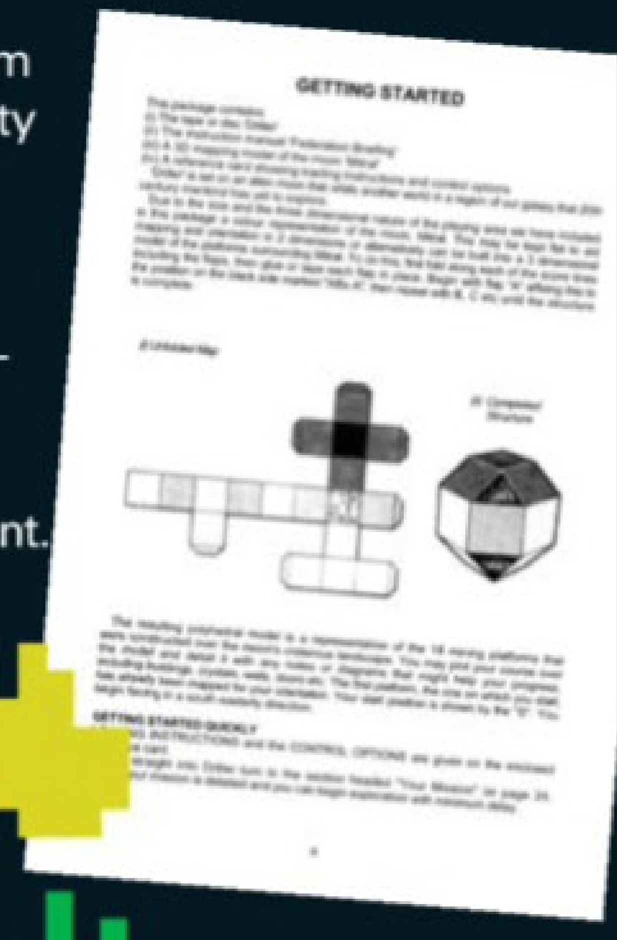


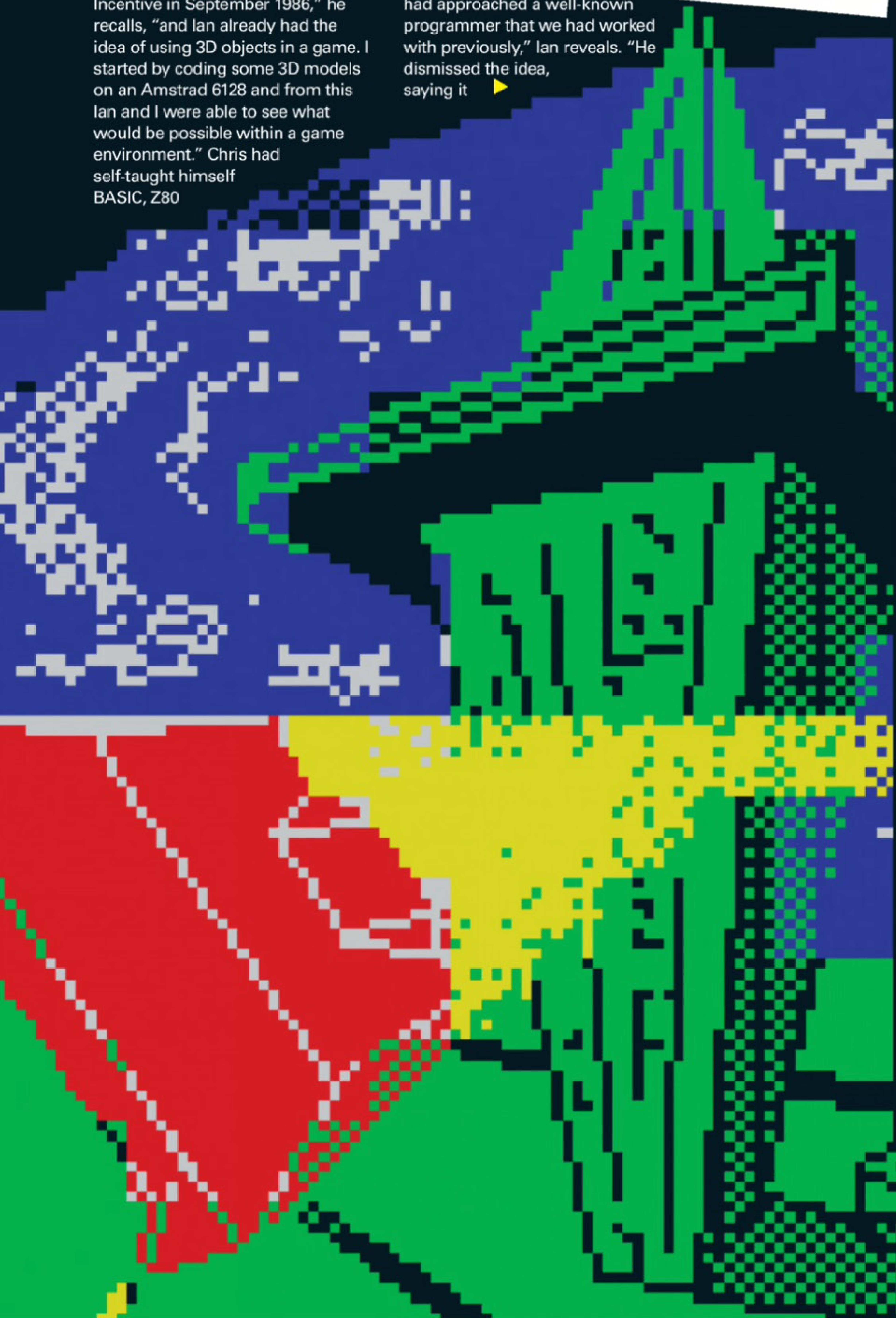

» [ZX Spectrum] Calling down a drill in the first sector.


» [ZX Spectrum] Well, X marks the spot we guess.

to develop. "At this point a game took three to six months from start to finish – we knew this was going to take much longer," Ian reveals.

In order to give the *Driller* and *Freescape* programming team its own identity and keep it distinct from Incentive's publishing arm, Incentive created an in-house coding team called Major Developments, a fitting name considering its first project. The team consisted of Stephen Northcott, Paul Gregory, Sean Ellis and Ian's own brother Chris. "I joined Incentive in September 1986," he recalls, "and Ian already had the idea of using 3D objects in a game. I started by coding some 3D models on an Amstrad 6128 and from this Ian and I were able to see what would be possible within a game environment." Chris had self-taught himself BASIC, Z80 and 6809 assembler from Spectrum and Dragon computers. A university course in mechanical engineering led to him using Fortran on the university's mainframe, before experience on radar displays, type-setting, code-testing and database coding set him up for a key role in *Freescape* and *Driller*'s development. Strangely, however, his brother wasn't the first person Ian approached to lead the *Driller* development team. "Before I asked Chris to join me, I had approached a well-known programmer that we had worked with previously," Ian reveals. "He dismissed the idea, saying it ▶





OH MY GOD THAT'S AMAZING

Games that defined 8-bit 3D gaming



ELITE FIREBIRD

■ The granddaddy of 3D games, and the one that gave the world an incredible mix of space exploration, trading and combat. Most remember the docking sequence; this may have been a frustrating experience, but there was no doubting the elegant *2001: A Space Odyssey*-esque style of *Elite*'s graphics.



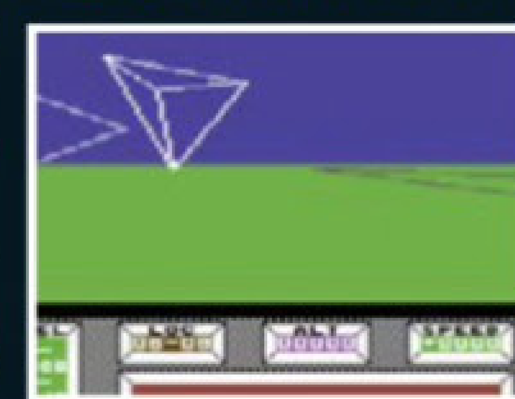
TAU CETI CRL

■ Inspired by the shading effects of Firebird's Gyron, programmer Pete Cooke created an immersive shooter complete with impressive shadow and light contrasts. It may have resulted in a pseudo 3D effect (the graphics were flat sprites), but *Tau Ceti*'s speed and light versus dark imagery still looks awesome.



STARSTRIKE 2
REALTIME

■ The original *Starstrike* was a blatant rip-off of the popular *Star Wars* arcade machine. The developer went one better with its follow up, re-creating the wire-frame graphics with the addition of some impressive shading. How they squeezed it all into the 48k Spectrum in particular is a bloody marvel.



MERCENARY
NOVAGEN

■ Paul Woakes' *Mercenary* redefined the wire-frame genre, not just in terms of graphics but also in gameplay. Playing a, well, mercenary, trying to escape the planet of Targ after he crash landed on its surface, *Mercenary* was an open world game before the term had been coined.



MICRONAUT 1
NEXUS

■ Pete Cooke again, and this time he took his cue from a concept he had devised where objects in the game's tunnels would clip behind each other, avoiding the processor-intensive re-draw. The ace programmer worked out the routine, and then welded the lighting-fast game to the result.



I, OF THE MASK
ELECTRIC DREAMS

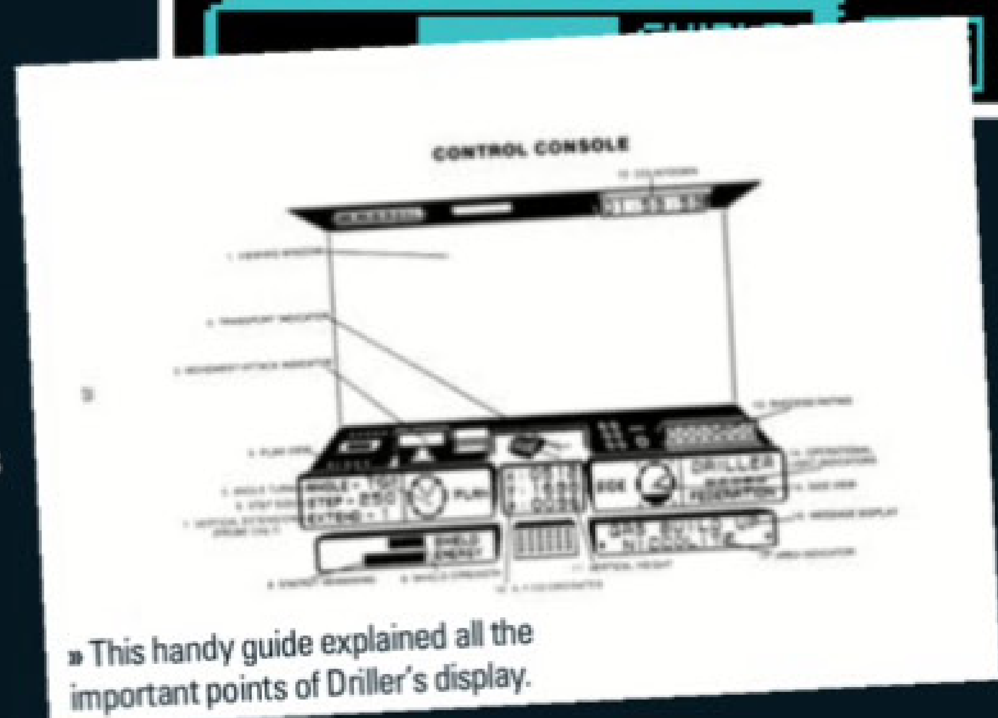
■ Sandy White didn't create many games for the Spectrum, but when he did they tended to be graphically amazing, and *I, Of The Mask* was no exception. This game may not be as fondly remembered as White's *Ant Attack* but still featured some striking graphics that moved at a very commendable pace.

couldn't be done. I shall mention no names!" Chris Andrew's reaction was much more in line with what Incentive were looking for. "I was excited by the challenge – although I'm not sure I fully understood how much Ian expected of me," he smiles. I mainly wondered how the hell I was going to get the game working on the ZX Spectrum!"

Driller is the story of Mitral, a moon orbiting its mother planet of Evath, a colony formed by humans after the expiration of our own planet. Years ago, Evath's worst criminals were sentenced to the harsh environment of Mitral to mine its precious minerals. Over time, this created a dangerous build-up of gas beneath the moon's surface which now threatens to cause it to explode, likely taking Evath with it. The player takes control of an excavation probe that can hunt for the gas pockets and call down a drill to relieve the pressure. To help with the operation, a reconnaissance jet can be found and piloted; it has weak shields but can assist in reaching areas inaccessible to the probe. Unfortunately Mitral is not lifeless: laser beacons and orbital scanners constantly harass the player and naturally there is a time limit. Take too long and BANG!



» [ZX Spectrum] Some sections could only be reached in the jet.



» This handy guide explained all the important points of Driller's display.

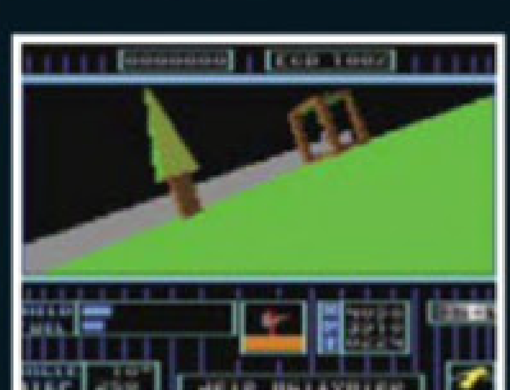
"Obviously we would have loved the game to have been faster"

Chris Andrew on the one criticism Driller received

The Z80 versions of *Driller* were created mainly by Chris on the Amstrad 6128 using the Devpac assembler. "It came in a plug-in ROM module that used very little vital memory," he recalls, "but even so I had to split the program into two parts as it became too big to assemble in one go." The main idea of *Driller* remained to create a game of exceptional freedom on the 8-bit computers. With *Freescape* behind it, the design needed to fit to the engine's capabilities. Ian Andrew was chief designer on *Driller*. "Design was all about making the game as quick as possible with the Freescape engine. Black backgrounds were quick, so it was set in space and the playing area was a square facet which was quick, too. So I then thought, how do I have lots of square play areas working together that are not visible to each other? The result was that the planet became a rhombicuboctahedron – 18 square facets with eight triangular gaps in between." Despite these ideas, the Major Developments team needed every trick in its repertoire to create a game fast enough to be playable on the 8-bit computers. "The usual way of doing 3D games was z-buffering," says Ian, "which

THE DARK SIDE AND BEYOND

The Further Adventures of Freescape



DARK SIDE 1988

■ The sequel to *Driller*, *Dark Side* expanded on the original story, albeit 200 years later. The Ketars have constructed a planet-killing weapon and once more it's up to you to save the day. Dropped onto the dark side of Mitral's sister moon, the game introduced enemy tanks, and telepods that could teleport the player to another sector instantly.



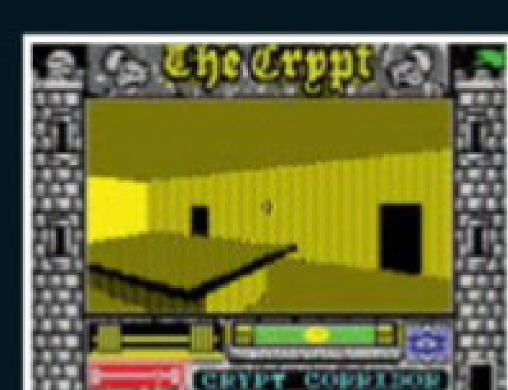
TOTAL ECLIPSE 1988

■ Taking leave from sci-fi, *Total Eclipse* moved to a more recognisable Egypt setting. An ancient curse threatens to destroy mankind; should the player fail to destroy the shrine to the Sun God, Ra, within two hours, a total eclipse will arrive and spell disaster. Of course, picking up a trinkets en route, *Indiana Jones*-style, is a must…



CASTLE MASTER 1990

■ Designed once more by Ian Andrew, the aim of *Castle Master* was to rescue your twin from the eponymous lord of the castle. The game was set in a fantastical medieval time and a raft of deadly traps and puzzles awaited the player, most of them designed by the devilish mind of Automata's Mel Croucher.



CASTLE MASTER II: THE CRYPT 1990

■ This sequel was not released on its own, only as a companion to its predecessor on the *Castle Master* compilation and Domark's *Virtual Worlds*, which collected those two games plus *Driller* and *Total Eclipse*. By now the game engine was looking a little bit tired, and the games extremely similar in design.



TOTAL ECLIPSE II: THE SPHINX JINX 1990

■ Once more only available in a collection that included the first game, *Total Eclipse 2* was actually nothing more than a new version of the original game, albeit with a few changes to the player's mission. The compilation was only available through home computer clubs.



3D CONSTRUCTION KIT 1991

■ Having exhausted the engine for its own purposes, Incentive released it to the world via this user construction kit and publisher Domark. It utilised pull-down menus that made placing objects very easy, even though the resulting games still moved at a snail's pace on the 8-bit computers.

is how you put objects in order by working out the nearest object to the viewpoint for every pixel." Unfortunately z-buffering was hugely processor-intensive and slowed a game of *Driller*'s scope down to a snail's pace. One clever solution was a technique the team called 'box sorting', as Ian explains, "each element was held within a bounding box which enabled the z-order to be completed with one check rather than the thousands involved for each pixel. And Chris used a unique sorting system which really enabled the game to become reality."

Freescape's main programmer takes up the story of the constriction on design and graphics. "Memory restrictions and speed were the main problems. The game data had to be as compact as possible – basic cuboids took eight bytes, pyramids 14 bytes. This included position, size and colour. Each object could also have behavioural instructions which took a few more bytes. There was no memory for z-buffering so the object sorting helped speed things up." Chris also wrote a useful hex editor that enabled his brother to add the behavioural logic to *Driller*'s datasets. This then defined what occurred when an object was shot at or walked into, such as the score changing or the object disappearing.

The Incentive boss appreciated his brother's efforts – after helping create the crazy arcade game, *Splat!*, Ian had found himself swamped with the daily grind of running a software company to dip his toes in development. "Designing *Driller* was hugely rewarding," he recalls, "as



» [Amiga] The 16-bit conversions naturally boasted improved and speedier graphics.

design was an aspect of games that had been lost to me over the years, despite my love of game design."

But in spite of the team's impressive efforts, *Driller* remained a slow-paced game. "Memory was re-used wherever possible; for example, the back buffer, where the next screen image is constructed, was used during the calculations and object sorting before the drawing even started," Chris explains. Despite many hours spent timing and optimising the engine's routines to save clock cycles, *Driller* still ran at a painstaking one frame-per-second. "Obviously we would have loved the game to have been faster," laments Chris, "but we did the best we could. The fact that nobody else managed to make 3D graphics faster on 8-bit machines must mean we did pretty well." During development, Incentive began an unusual teaser campaign to create excitement for the first *Freescape* game. "*Driller* in the new dimension," stated one advert while another twisted the knife into *Driller*'s vector peers with the pithy, "Forget wire-frame 3D. *Freescape* is SOLID!." "We did it to tease and build anticipation," remarks Ian, "Wire-frame games were about, but no-one had done a solid 3D game. So it seemed a good idea to tease people with the prospect of something new. And it



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SPLAT! (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, SAM COUPE
YEAR: 1983

MOON CRESTA
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, COMMODORE 64
YEAR: 1985

THE GRAPHIC ADVENTURE CREATOR
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1986



» [Amiga] The neutral stores was the first building the player was likely to encounter.

worked well." Always keen to give added value, Incentive included a 'make-it-yourself' model of Mitral and a rather extensive background story courtesy of Richard Robinson and Graham Sowerby.

With *Driller* taking approximately six months longer than planned ("I had to manage our cash flow very carefully," says Ian), anticipation had built up almost as much as the pockets of gas on Mitral. A demo on the front cover of *Crash* magazine helped garner further interest, as did the subsequent high praise of that magazine, and practically every other for the 8-bit formats. "We were very pleased with the response," says Ian, "and it gave us the impetus to make a few more games with the engine, before eventually finishing it off with the 3D Construction Kit that allowed people to make their own 3D environments." The success of *Driller* and *Freescape* led Incentive into further, more serious applications such as its advanced *Superscape* engine. With the power that the 16-bit machines and beyond brought, do Chris and Ian feel that *Driller* was a little before its time? "Yes, definitely," says Ian, "although doing it first gave us an advantage that led to the success." Chris agrees, "*Driller* was ahead of its time and later versions on the 16-bit computers were more fun to play with. In the end it all comes down to gameplay – simple graphics and great gameplay beat visually complex but rubbish gameplay any day."

Fortunately, *Driller* had both, and also played a key role in the development of videogames; its role in the move from flat sprites and two-dimensional worlds cannot be understated. How do the brothers feel having created such an iconic step? "I look back at those times in disbelief," says Chris, "Did we really do that with such primitive tools?" The more commercially-minded Ian wonders what could have been for Incentive, given the explosion of 3D first person games in the mid Nineties. "I sometimes wonder what would have happened if we had kept the focus on this technology area up until the present day. I guess maybe we would have been developing titles like today's stunning 3D games. But *Driller* itself? I probably wouldn't have done anything differently." Chris Andrew sums up concisely the blind optimism that youth can provide. "We were young and it seemed anything was possible," he smiles. "But I wouldn't change a thing. It was the best and most exciting time in my working life." ★

Our thanks to Ian and Chris Andrew.



» [ZX Spectrum] Lose all your energy and you were rewarded with a suitably 3D graphic.



» [ZX Spectrum] Sequel *Dark Side* continued the story.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

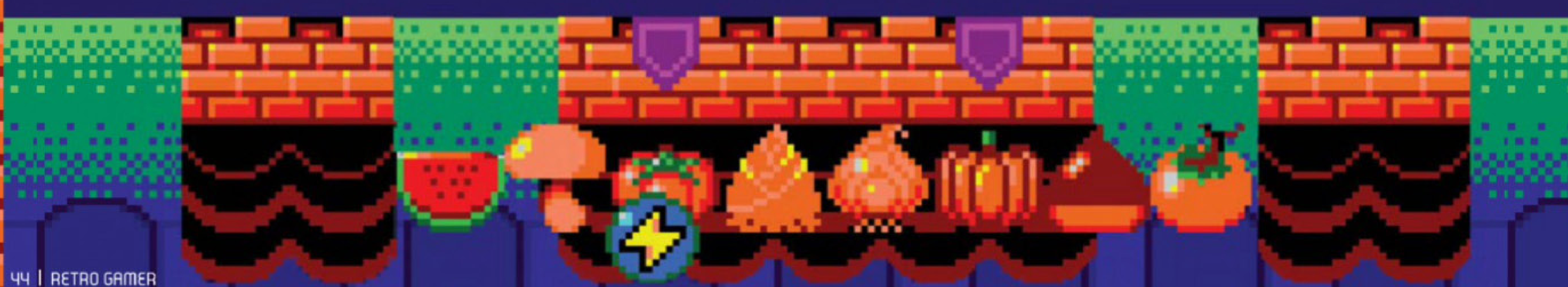
PARASOL STARS™

THE STORY OF BUBBLE BOBBLE III

First they were dinosaurs, then they hopped about on rainbows, and in Parasol Stars Bub and Bob returned, this time they were armed with brollies. Mike Bevan journeys through an overlooked platforming gem

In many ways, *Parasol Stars* is a bit of an oddity. Ostensibly the third game in Taito's *Bubble Bobble* series, it's probably best known in Europe because of its Amiga and Atari ST conversions, published by Ocean in 1992. However, unlike its more renown predecessors, *Bubble Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands*, *Parasol Stars* was never released as a dedicated arcade game. In fact, it started life as an original release on the Japanese PC Engine console, where it was subtitled '*The Story Of Bubble Bobble III*'. To make things more confusing, when Ocean brought it over for the 16-bit home computers they re-branded it '*The Story Of Rainbow Islands II*' for no obvious reason we can think of. No matter, though, because on its own merits *Parasol Stars* is a splendid arcade-style platform game, very much in the same mould as the popular *Bubble Bobble,* but one that in a lot of ways improves upon it.

For starters, it a much more varied and visually interesting game, featuring a variety of 'worlds' in which our heroes must battle through. Each world is connected by a short animated cutscene showing Bub and Bob (or Bubby and Bobby as they now seem to be known) travelling to a new planet, all off which are based on a certain theme and sporting new enemies and backgrounds. Expect to fight bum notes and pianos in Music World, shellfish and seahorses in Ocean World, tanks and robots in Machine World, and rampant fruit machines in Casino World, to



» [Amiga] *Rainbow World* also features the Doh heads from *Arkanoid* as enemies.



» [Amiga] A laughing one-armed bandit looks on we flush out some cards in *Casino World*.



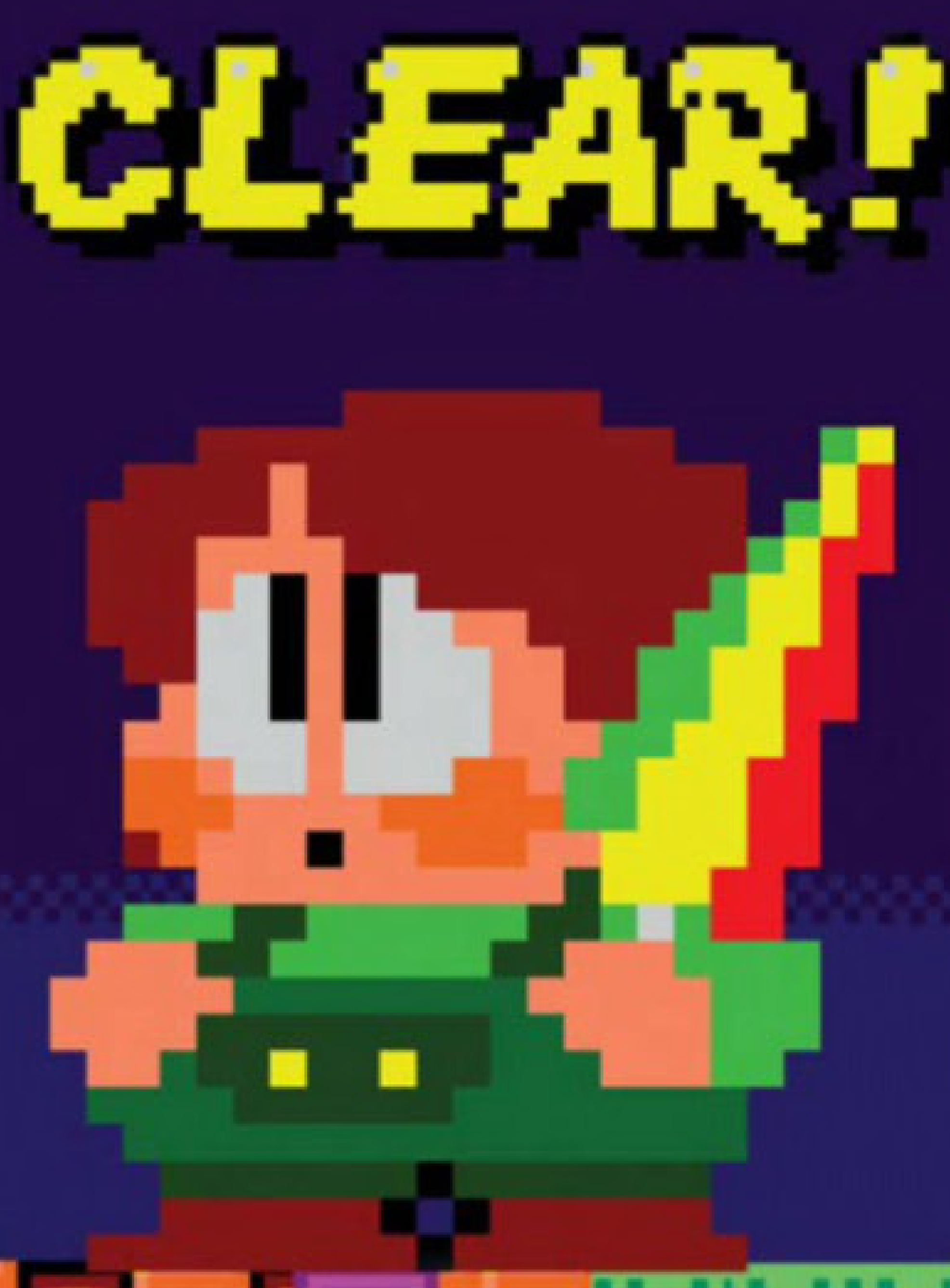
name a few. And while the level layouts have a certain similarity to *Bubble Bobble*, a few levels add a bit of scrolling to the mix rather than being set on a single screen, making for larger, more challenging playfields. Like *Rainbow Islands*, at the finale of each world our heroes must defeat a large and often slightly surreal boss character. We're talking bad-tempered sea monsters, drum-kits, UFOs, giant birds in plant pots, that sort of thing.

The variety also extends to the many ways you can now dispatch the bad guys. In their post-*Rainbow Islands* human forms, Bub and Bob have decided to arm themselves with one of the most vicious weapons known to man, the umbrella. Not that bubbles or rainbows were ever particularly rock hard or anything, but you know. Anyway, it turns out that the various inhabitants of *Parasol Stars* succumb quickly to parasol-related incidents like being bashed on the head and picked up and thrown across the screen. This being a *Bubble Bobble* game, there's usually a lot of different bubbles (fire, water, lightning and the all-new star power) floating about that can be gathered on top of your mighty brolly then fired at the baddies. And the non-boss enemies are now split into two categories, smaller minions that can be finished off in ▶

PIXEL PERFECT

Just a few of the ridiculously cute creatures found in Taito's incredibly colourful sequel. How many do you remember?





"It turns out that the various inhabitants of Parasol Stars succumb quickly to parasol-related incidents"



» [Amiga] There are more familiar enemies near the end of the game.

MIRACLE!

one hit, and medium-sized ones that take a few elemental attacks or objects chucked at them before they go down. Some of the bigger dudes even generate little baddies so it's a good idea to vanquish them as soon as you can.

Parasol Stars features the same frantic two-player action as *Bubble Bobble*, and the added feature of being able to parasol-chuck your buddy across the screen as you race to pick up bonus items is pretty hilarious. Crucially, though, it's probably a more playable single player game. There are plenty of secret items, and there is a degree of randomness that means no game plays the same as another. Probably the most important addition in terms of collectibles is the miracle icons, which appear in three forms, water, fire, lightning and star. Collecting any three of these grants a special 'miracle power', depending on the order in which they were collected, ranging from knocking all enemies on the screen unconscious to drastically speeding up the game. In order to see the true ending of *Parasol Stars*, players must make sure they grab a set of three star icons towards the end of the game, which grants them a special key to the last two worlds.

While the original PC Engine version of the game made it to North America after being released by US publisher, Working Designs, Ocean's European ports are surprisingly good, particularly the Amiga version. The Amiga and Atari ST versions even feature an exclusive hidden stage that can be accessed from the Ocean World level (see Hidden Boss boxout). The company had also planned to release ports of *Parasol Stars* for the Spectrum and Commodore 64, but these never materialised, despite adverts appearing in magazines of the time. After a lot of anticipation, C64 owners were rather disappointed when Ocean reported that the programmer of the conversion had been burgled, the code lost, and the port abandoned. Years later the story behind the lost 8-bit Commodore version surfaced when coder Colin Porch, the man behind the C64 conversions of *Operation Wolf* and *Terra Cresta*, revealed what really happened.

"I never told Ocean that there was a burglary," he tells us. "I suspect that story was put out to save my embarrassment. My wife at the



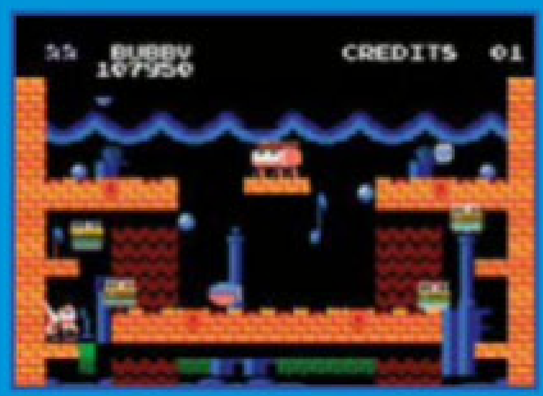
» [PC Engine] The helicopter baddies from *Rainbow Islands* make a re-appearance.

"Ocean's European ports are surprisingly good, particularly the Amiga version"

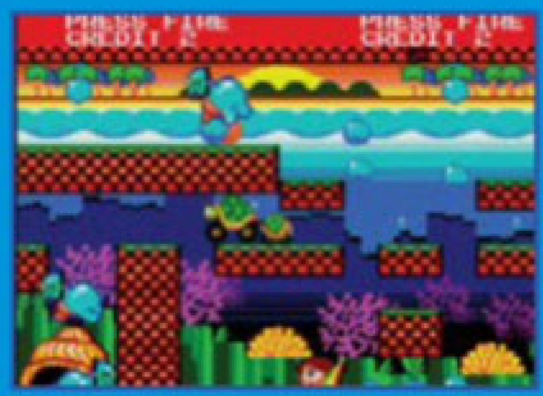
CONVERISION CAPERS











PC ENGINE

■ The PC Engine release is unique in being the original version of the game rather than an arcade port, so by definition it's the benchmark by which all the other conversions are judged. Its main advantage over the Amiga and Atari ST versions is that it uses the PC Engine's two button controller, meaning you get separate buttons for jumping and parasoling. There's also a slightly more varied soundtrack and a few minor graphical effects missing from the other 16-bit ports.

GAMEBOY

■ Ocean also released Game Boy and NES versions of *Parasol Stars* along with the Atari and ST ports. The handheld conversion suffers from a cramped playfield, meaning dodging baddies is much more difficult than before. Obviously there's no two-player mode either. Impressively, Ocean seem to have crammed in all the stages and bosses and even added a fruit-machine mini-game between rounds where you can rack up bonus points.

NES

■ Being on a less capable console compared to the PC Engine doesn't stop the NES version being a lot of fun. Ocean made a good job of recreating the look of the original despite the console's limited colour palette, also all the levels and bosses are intact. There's a bit of sprite flicker going on occasionally though, and we're not sure about the fact that the bubbles seem to roll around the screen like marbles rather than float elegantly about as in all other versions of the game.

AMIGA

■ By far the best of Ocean's conversions, the Amiga port looks and feels remarkably similar to the PC Engine game and, like the ST version, has the added bonus of an additional hidden level to play through. Considering it was created from scratch with virtually no guidance from Taito it's a remarkable achievement, more so when you consider how Mick West's team managed to pack in all the power-ups, bonuses, secrets and stages of Taito's original on a single floppy disk.

ATARI ST

■ The ST version uses most of the same assets as the Amiga port, being coded by the same team at Ocean, so it's also pretty decent. As Mick points out, though, the ST's lack of hardware sprites means it doesn't play quite as smoothly as the Amiga release. The scrolling on some of the later levels is also a bit wonky, and the music doesn't sound quite as nice. On the plus side the graphics, particularly the backgrounds, are possibly a little sharper than on the Amiga.

» [PC Engine] Machine World features lots of nasty mechanical enemies.



time was an alcoholic and we had many arguments about her drinking. A couple of months before, we had an accident at home when I left some unimportant computer discs in a box next to an industrial type heavy-duty vacuum cleaner. They became corrupted and I eventually determined that it was the magnetic field from that which had caused the damage. When my wife eventually walked out, she left all my work discs, including back-ups, under the cleaner and left it turned on. I could get no sense out of any of them. All I had was the sample shown to Ocean several weeks earlier, which was still in my briefcase. I told Ocean immediately what had happened, but they could not spare the time for me to catch up on the lost work."

Although Colin's version was far from finished, it remains one of the great 'what ifs' of C64 games folklore. "The last version I showed to Ocean had about half of level one completed," he recalls. "I remember that I had started on level two, but I'm not sure how far into it I was when I lost the work. I had hoped that the demo disk might have survived somewhere amongst my nostalgic collection of old things, but it hasn't surfaced." So it seems that we will unfortunately never know if this particular version of



Parasol Stars would have ever rivalled the popularity of the acclaimed C64 ports of *Bubble Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands*. Luckily we can still enjoy the lovely PC Engine original and Ocean's marvellous Amiga conversion, one of the best arcade-style ports on that machine. Even if it's not technically an arcade game… *



» [Amiga] Picking up the purple heart on this screen can lead to a secret hidden stage on the Amiga.

MICK WEST

The Neversoft co-founder tells us how he became involved with the amazing Amiga and ST ports of Parasol Stars



How did you get involved with programming the Amiga and Atari ST versions of *Parasol Stars*?
I was working at Ocean, and had just done an Amiga/ST game called *Darkman* (based on the film). So I think it was largely that I was available at the time, and had experience doing platform games.

Were you familiar with the game (or even *Bubble Bobble*) before you started working on it?
I was a big fan of both *Bubble Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands*, however I'd not played *Parasol Stars* before.

What gameplay reference did you use for programming the game seeing as there was no actual arcade version?
We used the PC engine version… at the time nobody seemed sure if there was an arcade version or not, or if there was one planned. I think we'd had a PC Engine in the office for a while at that point, people would import Japanese games. We had played *Bomberman* in the office, but *Parasol Stars* was the first time I played with it a lot.

Was it a case of playing through the game trying to copy the graphics and gameplay? Did you use any sprite conversion techniques or have to do the graphics from scratch?
We got the sprites in some ASCII format from Taito, but that's it. No documentation, no help at all… We had to convert them from 16 colours for each sprite to a fixed 16 colour palette. I wrote a tool to semi-automate that. The actual level layout and the gameplay had to be figured out by playing through the game multiple times, and watching videos.

Were there any difficulties technically converting it because of the amount of sprites, scrolling, and all the little Easter Eggs and secrets?
More so on the Atari ST version, due to the lack of hardware sprites and scrolling. On the Amiga we used hardware sprites for Bub and Bob, and with the hardware scrolling and more colours it made it way better than the ST version. We did have problems trying to figure out the logic behind how the various power-ups would appear. The algorithm by which the stars appeared was a bit of a mystery, and they seemed a bit random. We asked Taito what it was, but they did not reply, so I had to make it up. We also had problems with having only a single button on the joystick. The PC Engine version used one button to jump, and the other to activate the parasol, and pressing D-pad up would put the parasol up. But we had to use D-pad up to jump, so we used down to put the parasol up, and let it stay up if you did up-down to jump. That worked very well when you got used to it.

BOSS RUSH

The crazy mayors of Parasol Stars and how to defeat them



'Kick-Me' Drum Kit



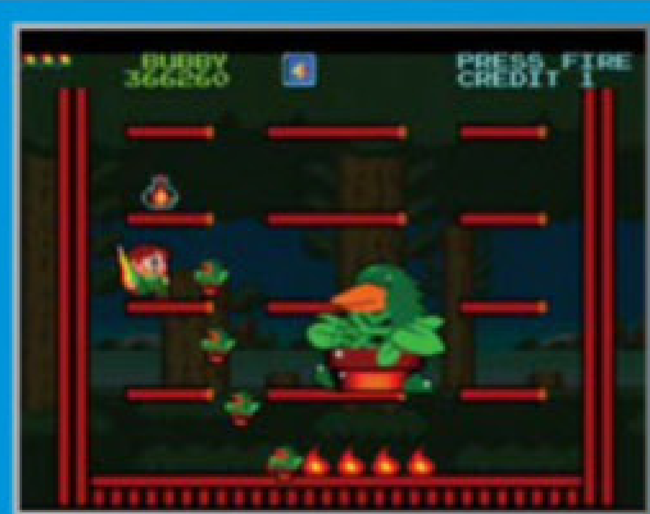
Weapon: Lightning

This one man band is the boss of the first section of the game, Music World, and isn't particularly threatening if you keep moving. Check out the dancing Lilliputian couple perched on his head.

How to defeat him:

You will first need to quickly jump upwards and grab the lightning bottle power-up, then evade his slow advance by using the ledges located on the left and right in order to cross the screen. You only need to zap him with a few charged lightning attacks to finish him pretty easily.

Mother Bird



Weapon: Fire

A big bird in a plant-pot awaits you at the end of Woodland World. She's a lot harder to defeat than the drum-kit boss, the main problem being that she keeps showering you with lots of annoying plant-pot chicks.

How to defeat her:

You're going to have to do a lot of running here to avoid getting hit by the chicks. You can shoot or shield them with your brolly but it's a case of getting as many fire hits in as possible before she gets close.

Jet Fighter



Weapon: Lightning

The Machine World stage pits you against this angry robot/plane. In his jet form he chases you around the screen firing missiles, stopping periodically to turn into a flame-throwing mech.

How to defeat him:

The safest place is located in the far bottom left or right corners of the screen where you can shield his relentless missile barrage attacks with your parasol. You need to try your best to hit him with a fully-charged water shot and move whenever it looks like he is going to flame you…

Sea Monster

Weapon: Lightning

Ocean World's boss takes the form of a large blue plesiosaur with an erupting volcano on its back. He doesn't chase you around the screen like the last two bosses but the scores of flying rocks he produces can make life tricky. Luckily your magic parasol makes a pretty good shield for his lava bombs.

How to defeat him:

Your umbrella is the key to survival here. Quickly stick it up over your head and jump up to get the lightning bottle. Then go to the lower left platform and let him have it, reopening your parasol between shots.



Charioteer

Weapon: Lightning

Hailing from the Casino World stage, this foxy croupier rides a flying one-armed bandit, showering you with lethal dollar bills. Your umbrella will safeguard you from the raining cash but her unicorn steed will home in mercilessly on your position so it's best to keep relocating while shooting at her.

How to defeat her:

Once you've grabbed the lightning bottle, try to keep dashing under her with your parasol raised to deflect the deadly fruit machine's payout. Attacking her with several charged shots should be enough finish her off.



Super Drunk

Weapon: Lightning

Usually *Parasol Stars* ends when you fight the Bub boss at the end of Rainbow World. However if you manage to collect three star miracle icons in a row you get a key to Bubble Bobble World enabling you to enjoy some revamped classic levels from the first game and fight a familiar face…

How to defeat him:

Anyone who's played *Bubble Bobble* will have an idea how to tackle Super Drunk. Watch out for his bottle-lobbing attacks, and try to get behind him and blast him with some well-timed lightning. Cue one reformed drunk.



Giant Mech

Weapon: Star

A mean-looking mech awaits you at the end of Giant World, and his method of attack is chucking boomerangs at our heroes.

How to defeat him:

Keep your distance because the boomerangs adhere to the half of the screen where the boss is. Keep moving in the opposite direction to him so you can launch charged star attacks.



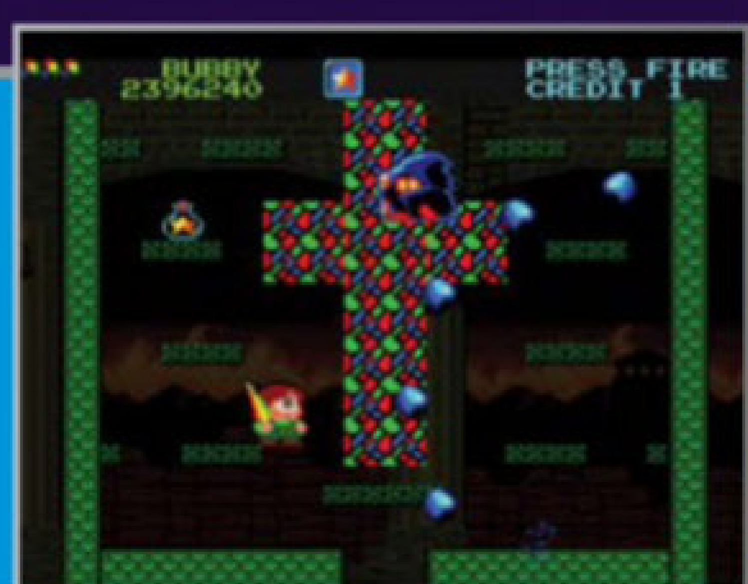
Bub Doppleganger

Weapon: Water

He's Bub, but not as we know him, in his dinosaur guise and sporting a suit of armour no less. He's also one of the toughest bosses in the game.

How to defeat him:

Fake Bub's bubbles don't actually travel far. It's really a case of dodging or blocking the bubbles and trying a mixture of quick and charged water attacks until he dies.



Super Mighta

Weapon: Star

The final level of *Parasol Stars* features ghoulish nasties. Super Mighta, a Grim Reaper-like boss, is very similar to a baddie in the original *Bubble Bobble*.

How to defeat him:

Although he showers you with a circular projectile attack, Super Mighta can be undone with the star bottle power-up which grants Bub and Bob similar offensive properties.



Chaostikan

Weapon: Star

The true boss of Nightmare World flings fireballs and enemies around the screen He's undoubtedly the toughest boss in the game.

How to defeat him:

There's not a lot you can do here to not get hit with an army of baddies and all the missiles raining downwards. Try and do your best with the star power-up to clear them out…



Flying Saucer

Weapon: Fire

The boss of Cloud World takes the form of a giant UFO. After the last two boss fights, he's not too hard to kill as he doesn't fire anything at you.

How to defeat him:

Fire-bottled up, Bub and Bob just need to keep dropping charged attacks to set the floor alight to cook the saucer when it dive bombs. Just be sure not to get caught in your own fire…



Hidden Boss

This scary chap is the boss of a hidden alternative version of Nightmare World in the Amiga and Atari ST ports of the game. Reaching this boss is rather difficult, ideally requiring you to enlist a buddy for some two-player co-op action. On stage four of Ocean World you need to pick up the heart icon, kill all the baddies then nab every single green pepper before they disappear to access his domain.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

RGT Retro Gamer Travels

How the rest of the world experienced your favourite games



JPN

» [Master System] Ninja enemies felt like a weird fit considering *Alex Kidd*'s usual fantasy foes, but fit the original game much better.

ANMITSU HIME

JPN → ROW
Japan → ROW

ANMITSU HIME
Departing: 1987

FORMAT
Master System

DEVELOPER
Sega

YEAR
1987

ORIGIN
Japan

LOCALISED FOR
Rest Of World

REASONS
Commercial

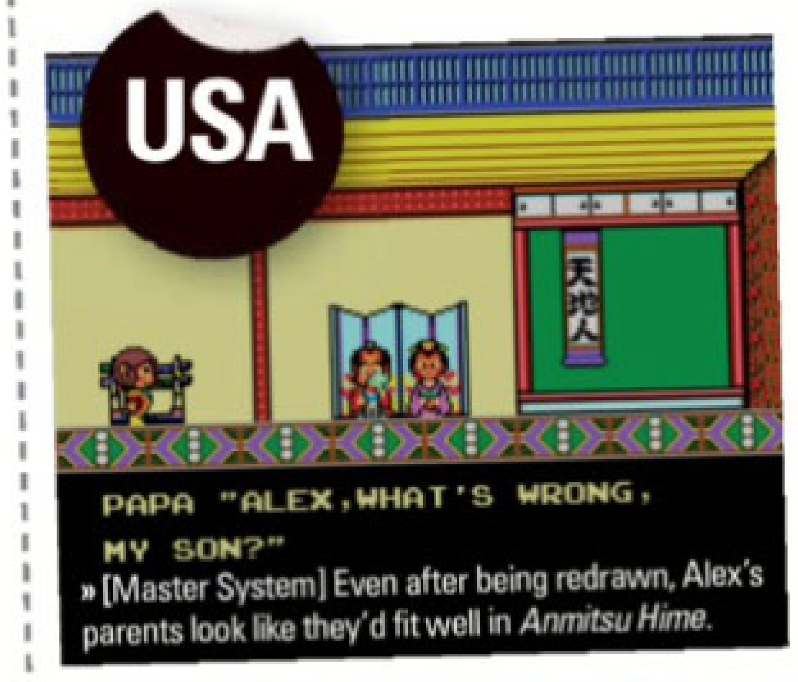
■ When a series of games has run for a little while, there's always the chance that some games will stand out as odd when compared to their predecessors. One example of this is with *Alex Kidd: High-Tech World*, a 1989 release which contains some rather radical game design departures. Rather than the platforming action of *Miracle World* or *The Lost Stars*, *High-Tech World* starts with Alex off wandering around a castle, talking to its inhabitants in an attempt to piece together the map to an arcade. Of course, *High-Tech World* was never originally an *Alex Kidd* game so the strangeness is easy to explain.

With the vast majority of third-party developers tied up in restrictive licensing agreements with Nintendo, Sega sometimes had to get a little creative to fill the Master System's release schedule, particularly as resources were being stretched to support the Mega Drive. In this case, the creativity extended to a minor makeover of the Japanese release, *Anmitsu Hime*, a puzzle adventure with some light platforming elements starring a tomboyish princess. The game was a licensed release which made sense in Japan – the animated series which it was based on was the third televised adaptation of the popular manga from the Fifties. However, it had no chance outside of Japan due to a stark lack of brand recognition.

The game that resulted was an odd clash of styles, as much of *Anmitsu Hime*'s feudal Japanese style carried over to *Alex Kidd: High-Tech World*. This included the character designs, despite the fact that every character sprite had to be redrawn in order to avoid licensing issues with Fuji TV. However, the greater problem with the localisation into *Alex Kidd: High Tech World* is that without familiar cultural ties or exposure to the licensed media, much of the context behind in-game actions disappears. Praying at a shrine 108 times to solve a puzzle would make sense to a Japanese player as it ties to domestic spiritual traditions, but without that cultural background it seems arbitrary and irritating.

In all, the most that can be said about *Anmitsu Hime*'s localisation into *Alex Kidd: High-Tech World* is that it provides a good example of how *not* to do things. The original game wasn't one of Sega's better Master System efforts, and it proved to be a rather poor foundation upon which to build an internationally appealing title – let alone one in a series which had established audience expectations like *Alex Kidd*.

USA



» [Master System] Even after being redrawn, Alex's parents look like they'd fit well in *Anmitsu Hime*.



JPN

ECONOMY

RGT SHENMUE II

JPN ➔ EU
Japan ➔ Europe

SHENMUE II
Departing: 2001

FORMAT
Dreamcast

DEVELOPER
Sega AM2

YEAR
2001

ORIGIN
Japan

LOCALISED FOR
Europe

REASONS
Sex/Gender

ECONOMY

The international release of *Shenmue II* was a rather controversial one. Where the first game had been released worldwide on Dreamcast and dubbed into English outside of Japan, the second game was released with Japanese voices and subtitles for cost reasons – and then only in Europe, as Microsoft had snapped up the game as an Xbox exclusive in North America. However, the European version's voice work does actually contain some changes relating to the character of Yuan, a knife-obsessed neat freak who appears as a rather prominent villain on the game's third disc.

In the Japanese version of the game, Yuan is voiced by a man and is established as a cross-dressing male, who happens to be engaged in a relationship with fellow villain Dou Niu – also a man. However, the character's lines were re-recorded in Japanese by a female voice actress for the European release. While Sega never explained this decision at the time, the fact that the game features a number of violent confrontations with a cross-dressing man in a gay relationship might not have gone down well with some audiences at that time. The English dub featured in the Xbox version of the game retains this change, with Yuan's voice acting provided by a woman.



» [Dreamcast] In Europe, she's a butch woman. In Japan, he's an effeminate man. Confused yet?



» [Dreamcast] The nature of Yuan's relationship with Dou Niu is altered depending on the version you play…

RGT THE SIMPSONS

USA ➔ JPN
USA ➔ Japan

THE SIMPSONS
Departing: 1991

FORMAT
Arcade

DEVELOPER
Konami

YEAR
1991

ORIGIN
USA

LOCALISED FOR
Japan

REASONS
Difficulty

ECONOMY

We love *The Simpsons*, as we've some fond memories of getting full four-player teams together to try to take the game down, but it was never the easiest game. Konami certainly recognised this, and made the game easier while refining it for Japanese release. The game's handling of health was overhauled considerably, with players now able to gain life past the normal limit of their life bars by picking up items while at full health, and more healing items were made available throughout the game in general. The added items include an explosion of fruit when Smithers is defeated, which might have seemed like social commentary from an American developer!

Weaponry has also been made more abundant in the Japanese version, and the slingshot is considerably more powerful, too, now delivering one-hit kills. Enemies also swarm the player a little less intelligently. However, the major addition to the Japanese version is a nuclear bomb item which does major damage to on-screen enemies. While the changes mean that it won't quite be the same version of *The Simpsons* you remember playing when you were younger, we would argue that the improvements make the Japanese version the better game to play today.



» [Arcade] The slingshot is enormously powerful in the Japanese version, taking enemies down in a single hit.

» [Arcade] The western version of *The Simpsons* is hard to go back to after playing the well-rounded Japanese version.

THE Bluffer's guide TO



» [Atari 2600] Though *E.T.* was an abysmal game, it wasn't a rare example of poorly developed licensed games of the time.

Licen… GAM…

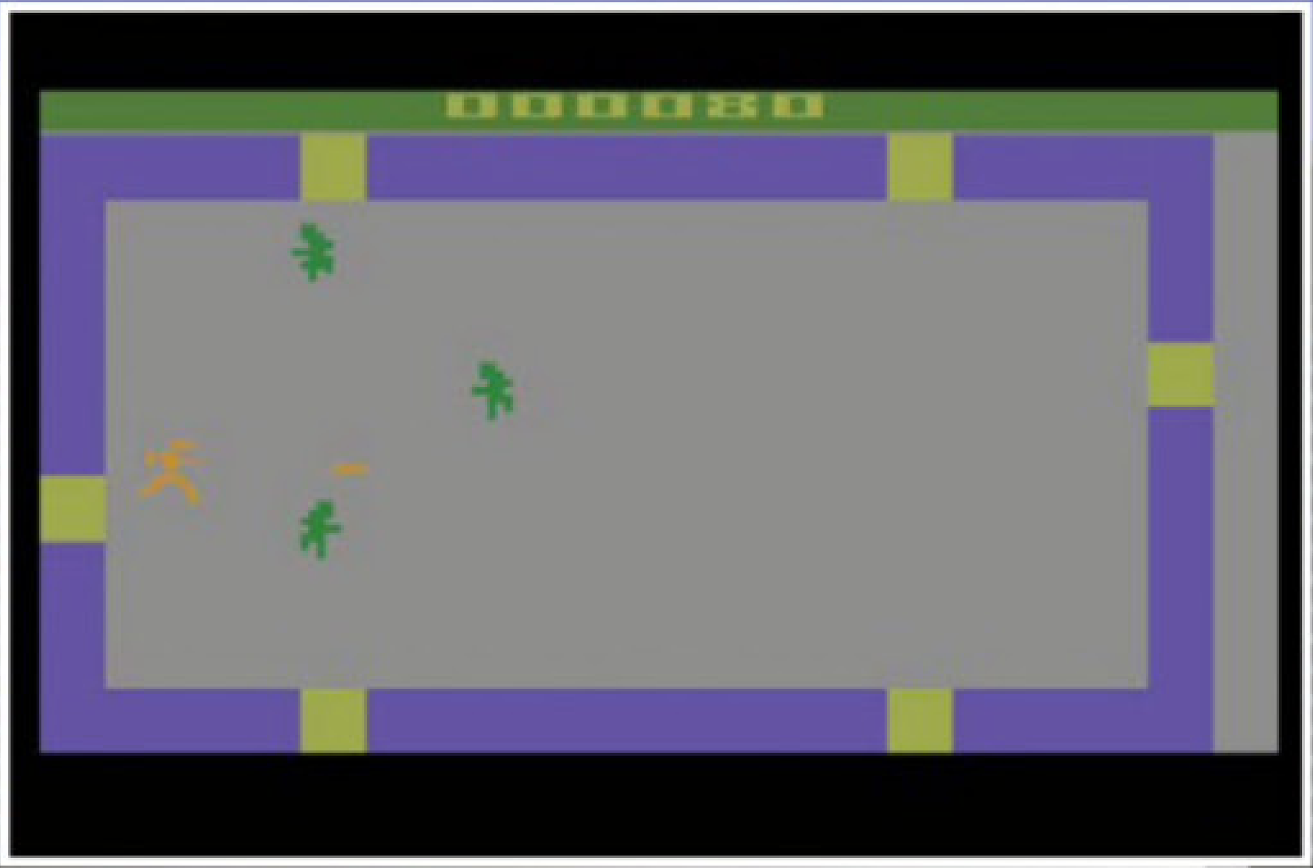


» [C64] Indy's outings on consoles and home computers rarely achieved much, usually pitting the adventurer in a sub-par platformer.

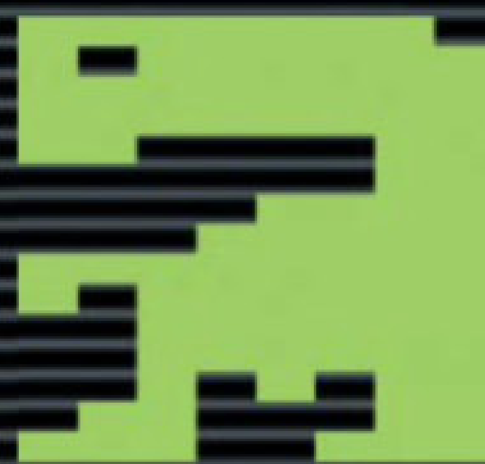
From the cartoon mascots of the Eighties and Nineties to carbonated soft drinks, it seems every brand has tried to break into videogames at some point – a facet that doesn't seem to be abating any time soon. Adam Barnes explores the ever erratic nature of licensed games, from their best to their worst

Everyone's familiar with the reputation of licensed games and so you'll likely already know about how they can quickly came to represent the absolute dirge of the industry. But the history of licensed games is a tumultuous one, riddled with more ups and downs than *Dig Dug*. As home computers and consoles become popular, however, even in the limited fashion in it's earliest days, it was perhaps inevitable that cross-media promotion would filter down into our adored pastime. It's also inevitable that such a huge subject manner will mean that not everything will be able to showcase in this feature. After all, if we were simply to create a list containing every single licensed game that was made, it would easily fill these eight pages alone.

The birth of licensed games truly began with the 1976 release of the controversial *Death*



» [Atari 2600] Disney's involvement with the games industry started at the earliest opportunity with its *Tron* licensed game.



nsed MES



» [C64] *The Addam's Family* featured in a number of licensed games across the C64, NES, SNES, Mega Drive and Game Boy.

Race in the arcades, but on consoles it didn't take much longer to take root. In a fitting move in 1981, Mattel released an Intellivision game based on *Tron*, the film where the entire concept revolved around this new electronic age and, with it, gaming. The game, named *Tron: Deadly Discs*, was a riff on the disc-throwing scene of the film, and it was a robust combat game. Two more *Tron* games followed, in fact, another on Intellivision and one on Atari 2600, but now the seal was broken. Having seen the potential for marketing, licensors moved to bring their films over to computers to capitalise on the popularity that these machines were building. With the Atari 2600 proving its popularity, it was here that much of these early licensed games began to appear – then the *real* push from brands began.

It wasn't long, 1982, in fact, until things started to spiral downwards. Atari 2600's *Alien* was the first of many shameless knock-offs, a *Pac-Man* styled maze game that saw the player collecting Xenomorph eggs while avoiding being chomped by the titular aliens. Similarly this was the year *E.T.* made his way over to Atari 2600 – a disappointing game whose infamy has lived long in the annals of time. Then there was *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*, also developed by *E.T.* designer Howard Scott Warshaw which followed a similar template of room exploration. It was a little better received – an action-driven film already had a closer fit to gaming than the likes of a sickly alien – but it still offered very simple gameplay and little in the way of graphics. 1982 also saw the release of *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, a *Defender* clone with Luke Skywalker taking on AT-ATs with his Snowspeeder. Then there was *Snoopy And The Red Baron* in 1983 – also a *Defender* clone – alongside a horrible score



KNOW YOUR LICENSED GAMES

DISNEY
■ The House Of Mouse studio has a long and colourful history with videogames, but during the 16-bit era it managed to make some real standout titles.

IP
■ Standing for 'intellectual property', IP is essentially the term which is used to denote one company's ownership over something that is conceptual as a brand.

BART SIMPSON
■ Bart Simpson's rebellious attitude had caught the attention of a younger demographic – meaning it'd be his face, not any other Simpson, who'd obviously appear on the box.

LICENSOR
■ The person or company who owns the rights to an IP. Licensors would often contact particular developers – or request pitches – to have a brand turned into a game.

SPIDER-MAN
■ Though superheroes ended up separating themselves from the stigma of licensed games, some great games – such as many of *Spider-Man*'s – proved they could work.

OCEAN SOFTWARE
■ Before the likes of EA and Activision, Ocean Software was one of the biggest proponents of licensed games – obviously seeing the value in brand recognition.

E.T.
■ Though the Atari 2600 had plenty of awful licensed games, the disaster that was *E.T.* game was so bad it has since been attributed as the cause of the first videogames crash.

COOL SPOT
■ In a surprise twist, *Cool Spot* ended up being a fantastic platformer – a necessity since in Europe the 7 Up brand used Fido Dido as its mascot, so the game had to stand alone.



WHAT MAKES A GREAT *Licensed game*

SMART GENRE CHOICE
■ Brands need to be used in genres that makes sense. *Harry Potter* doesn't fit in a gritty third-person shooter, for example.

DISTILLATION OF THE BRAND
■ A game that focuses on the ideals of a brand usually ends up being all the better for it. The understanding of the brand shines through.

A GREAT GAME, REGARDLESS OF THE BRAND
■ It might sound obvious, but the best licensed games are only a success when it is first a game worth playing.

SUBTLE BRANDING
■ When food or consumer products are involved, these games are adverts. The best don't make obvious use of these brands, though.

▶ attack *Tazmanian Devil* game, which was rebranded as *Asterix* in Europe. By the time the Commodore 64 released in 1982, licensors were scrambling to ride the wave of gaming's popularity – a factor that Ocean Software looked to capitalise on. As the prime publisher of licensed games at the time, Ocean's reach continued to grow – beginning in 1985 through to 1990. It tackled everything it could, from *Addam's Family* to *Batman* and *Rambo* to *Short Circuit*. Nothing would avoid its gaze, and before long it had (almost single-handedly) managed to drag licensed games back from the brink of an already dismal reputation. Ocean, it seemed, knew how to utilise brands for the betterment of gaming and the licences it would tackle, particularly with movies like *Robocop*, would go on to spawn numerous sequels, including a tie-in with the popular *Terminator* licence.

"If you're working with someone who is hands-on," says David Bishop, "it's down to firstly whether they get games." David's development career has revolved around licensed games, having worked on some of the SNES and Mega Drive's most popular branded games. "Some licensors just don't get games," he adds, "and in a way they may be frustrated game designers. And that can be a real problem, because not only do they not understand what makes a good game, they want to be involved and they want to get their hands dirty so to speak. They think it would be a cool thing to be associated with and, in a way, more exciting than their day job." Ocean maintained a sense of reverence for its licensed games, albeit regularly using familiar concepts as the base foundation for each game. 1985's *Rambo* took the top-down shoot-'em-up gameplay of *Commando* and plastered Sylvester Stallone on the box. Or there was 1986's *Batman*, which took the *Knight Lore* format and reworked it with the Caped Crusader. Yet as well received as many of these branded



games were, not all of Ocean's licensed output maintained that same sense of quality. 1986 saw the release of the disliked *The Transformers* game, a confusing adventure game in *Short Circuit* and a detestable *Highlander* game – the latter of which being given 30% in *Zzap64*, exposing its origin as a shameless film tie-in – even then, the concept was despised.

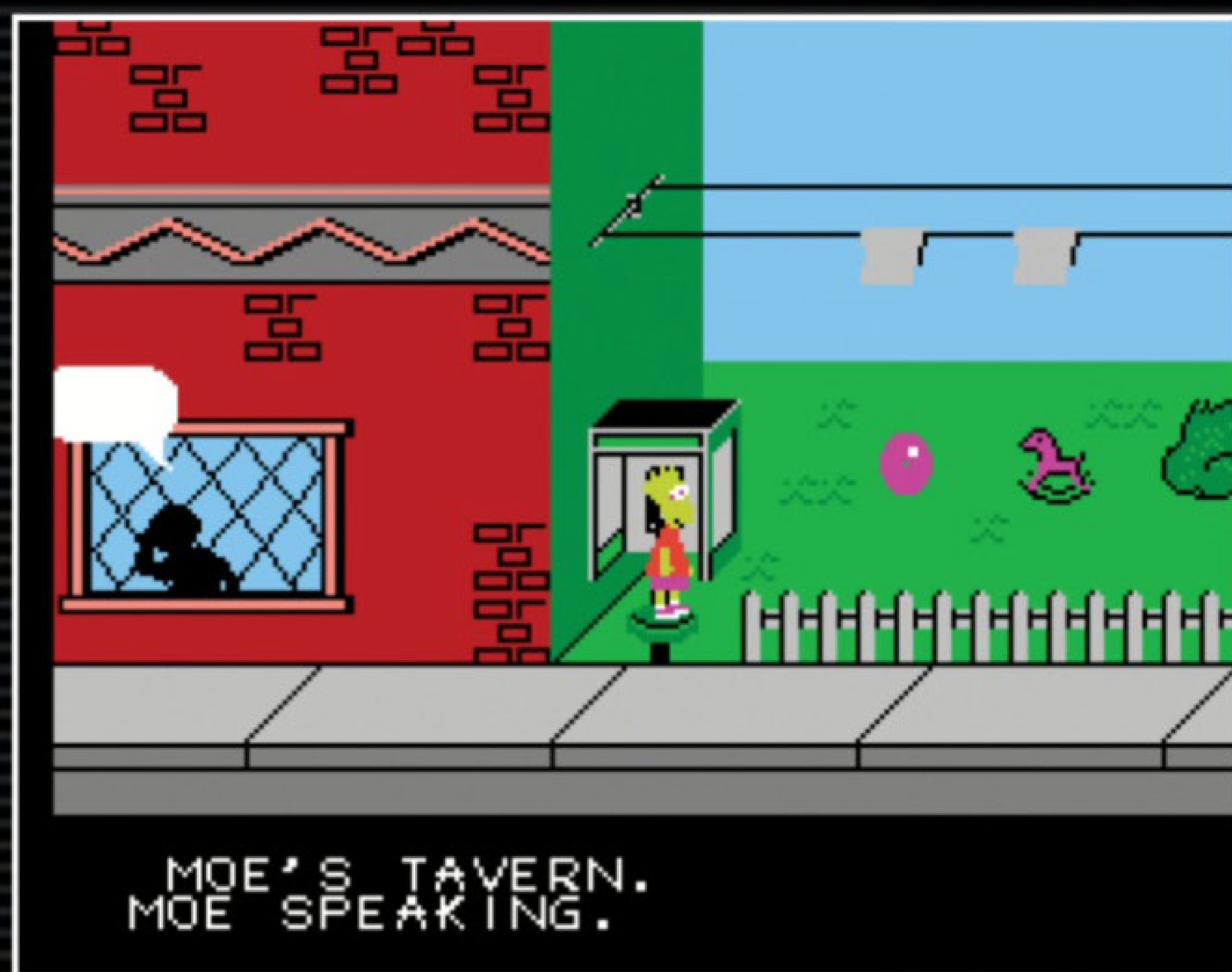
It wasn't all doom and gloom, however. By the time of Nintendo's release of the NES, developers had released a number of notable licensed games – their financial successes more than providing the ammunition licensors needed to arrange for their own brands to make the journey over to videogames. *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* was one of the first to make the transition to NES in 1989, a name that has holds a great deal of prestige as far as licensed games go due to the amphibian quartet's memorable and well-loved releases. Its first outing, however, earned varied critical responses thanks in large part to the poor quality of its ports. Its difficulty was notorious, but all the same the game achieved great success at retail – earning itself 4 million copies sold. The *Gremlins* film sequel – and the marketing power behind it – had meant a NES sequel to the otherwise forgettable Atari 2600 original was released, mercifully offering a much more robust and enjoyable experience the second time around. *The Simpsons*, too, had its console debut on Nintendo's machine, beginning its own turbulent love affair with videogames alongside the 1991 release of *Bart Vs. The Space Mutants*. Bartmania was in full effect, and that meant this first *Simpsons* game was



» [NES] *DuckTales* was a rare mix of a great, original idea combined with fantastic use of an existing brand.

quickly followed up by *Bart Vs. The World* and then *Bartman Meets Radioactive Man*, each of decreasing interest critically and commercially. 1992 also saw the release of the surprisingly well-done *Lemmings*-alike puzzle game, *Krusty's Super Funhouse*, highlighting just how much Fox were keen to dominate the market with *The Simpsons*. Acclaim would later go on to tackle many more licences, from the Olsen twins to *South Park* and everything in between.

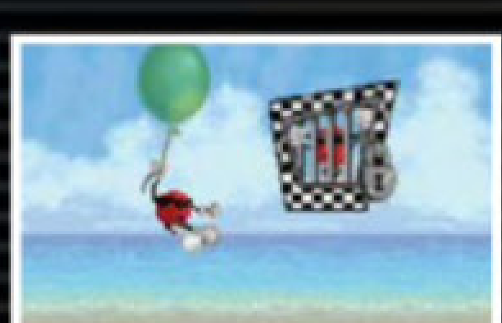
A new trend was arising, however, and as the videogame boom really began to take



» [NES] *The Simpsons* craze was widespread by the time the NES was out; a licensed game was inevitable.

Five ESSENTIAL GAMES

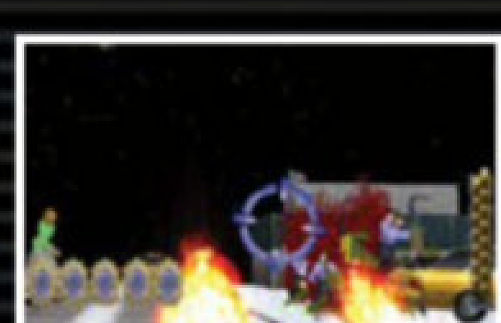
Not all licensed games are terrible; here are the ones that you really should play.



COOL SPOT

■ 1993 ■ Mega Drive

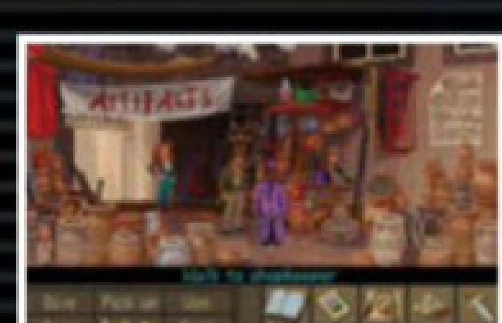
Making a game based on a red dot must be difficult enough, let alone when that red dot is part of a drink brand. In many ways it was a blessing, however, since the US mascot for 7 Up – the eponymous *Cool Spot* – was an unknown in Europe, forcing developer Virgin Interactive to make a game actually worth playing.



DIE HARD TRILOGY

■ 1996 ■ PlayStation

While the third game in the package was a bit of a dud, the first and second were more than enough to gamers to sink their teeth in. The first film was presented as a third-person shooter as McClane climbs each floor, the second being an on-rails shooter set at an airport – all three being as explosive as the films.



INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS

■ 1992 ■ DOS

The LucasArts helped drag the adventurer out of the snake pit shared with most licensed games and into the hall of fame. There were two LucasArts *Indy* games, with the second – the *Fate Of Atlantis* – being the better product overall.



ROBOCOP

■ 1988 ■ Various

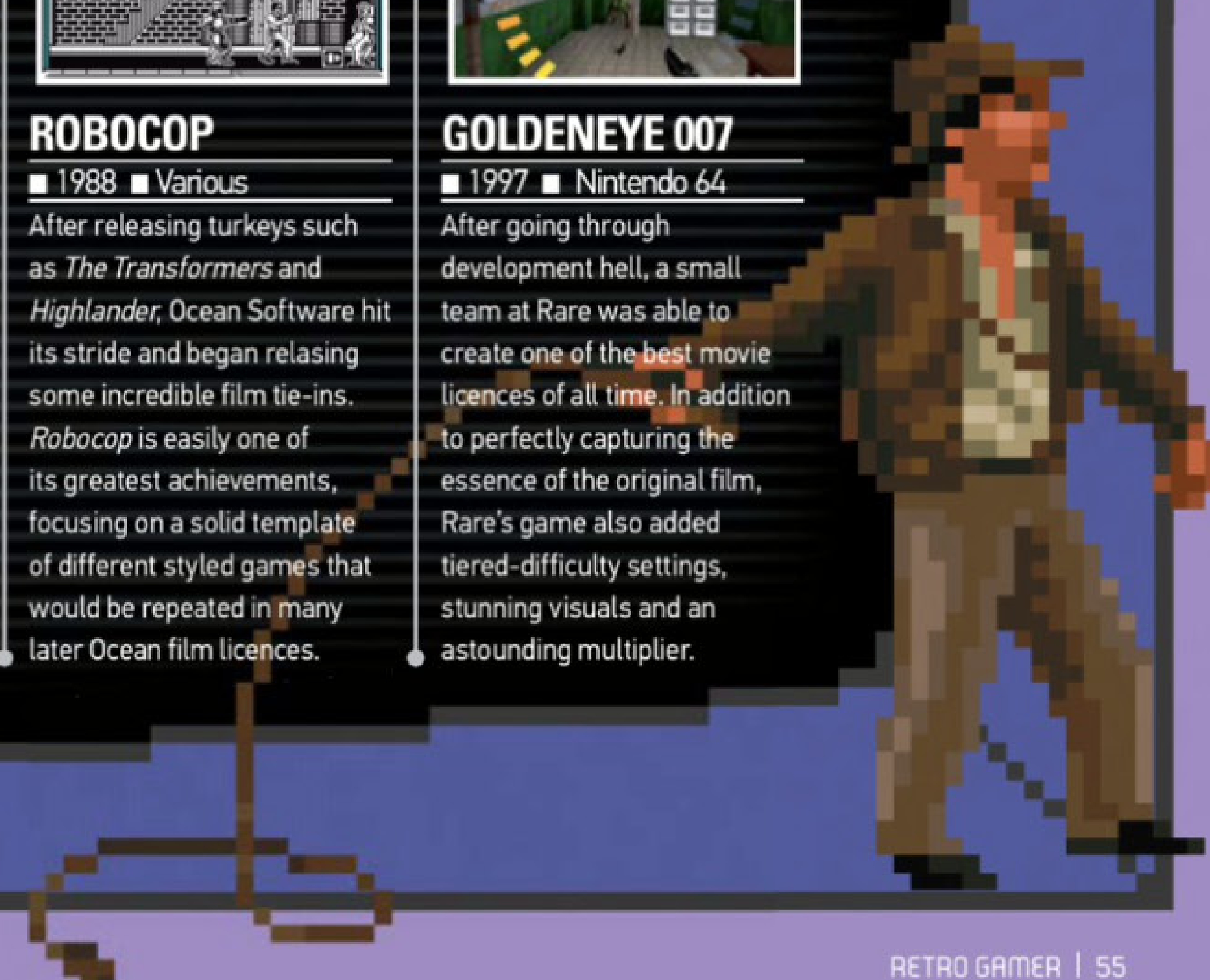
After releasing turkeys such as *The Transformers* and *Highlander*, Ocean Software hit its stride and began relasing some incredible film tie-ins. *Robocop* is easily one of its greatest achievements, focusing on a solid template of different styled games that would be repeated in many later Ocean film licences.



GOLDENEYE 007

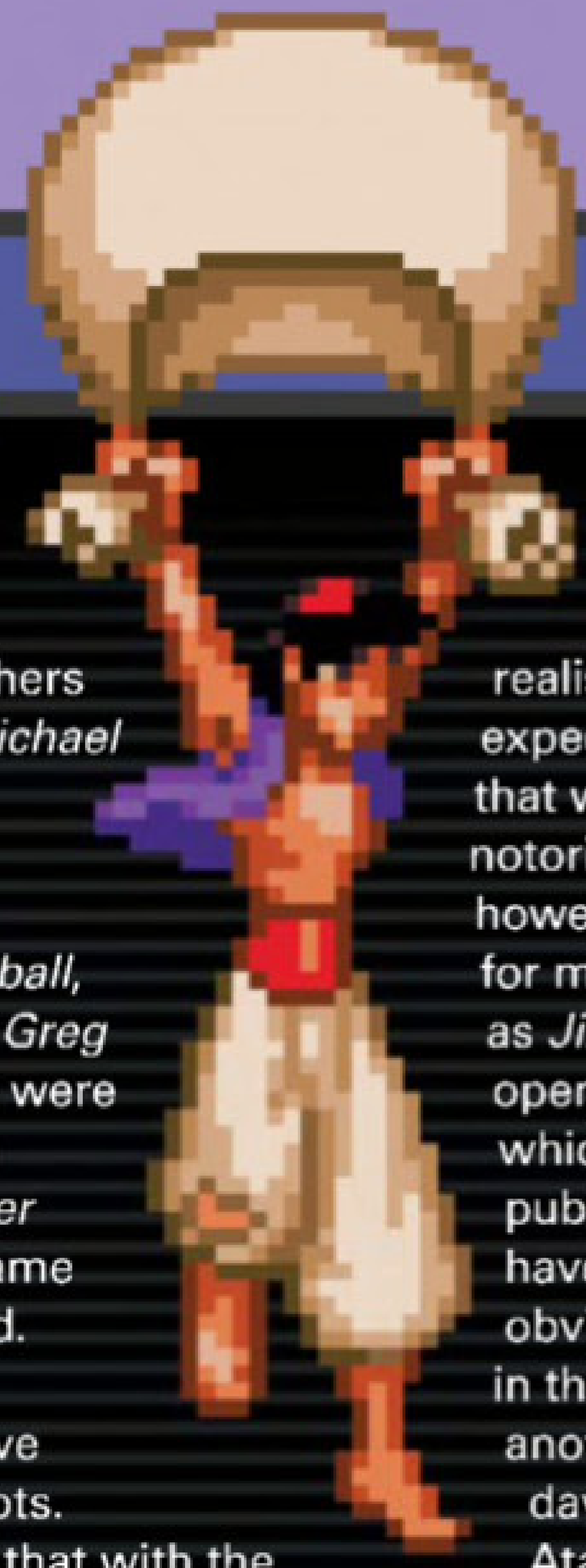
■ 1997 ■ Nintendo 64

After going through development hell, a small team at Rare was able to create one of the best movie licences of all time. In addition to perfectly capturing the essence of the original film, Rare's game also added tiered-difficulty settings, stunning visuals and an astounding multiplier.





» [NES] The *TMNT* game was famous for its difficulty, but it was also a great use of the licence.



hold, it was clear there were others taking note. After the release of *Michael Jackson's Moonwalker* in 1989 there came an influx of brands from *people* rather than products. From the likes of *Bo Jackson Baseball*, *Bill Elliott's NASCAR Challenge* or *Greg Norman's Golf Power*, sports stars were starting to get in on the act. "With *Jimmy White's 'Whirlwind' Snooker* we actually wanted to make the game play like Jimmy White," says David. "He was famous for playing very quickly, and being a very aggressive player in terms of going for his shots. So we – inasmuch as we could do that with the so-called artificial intelligence – certainly tried to make the game feel like it was Jimmy White playing." *Jimmy White's 'Whirlwind' Snooker* was a stellar example of this craze; developed by Archer MacLean and released in 1991 across a number of platforms it was essentially an electronic recreation of the game of snooker. It was a well-crafted title, offering the typical (and realistic) games of snooker as you might expect, but also a trick shot mode – a feature that went hand-in-hand with Jimmy White's notorious skills. It was a commercial success, however, having stayed in the top 20 charts for months. "The fact that it was branded as *Jimmy White's 'Whirlwind' Snooker* opened a lot of doors," claims David, "by which I mean doors from a distribution and publicity perspective that you wouldn't have had without the brand. And that's obviously one of the reasons people do that in the first place, because otherwise it's just another snooker game. At the end of the day that game stayed in the charts – for Atari ST, Amiga, PC – that game pretty much stayed in the top 20 for the best part of a year. Now it got into the charts because it was *Jimmy White*'s Whirlwind Snooker, I think it stayed in the charts because it was just a fantastically made game."

That is the pertinent point: though the brand helped elevate it above its competitors – consumers would certainly pay more heed to a snooker game if it had Jimmy White on the box – it maintained its success because of how well designed it was. While sports personalities were becoming big business for games publishers, they weren't the only licences that were being exploited. Publishers and developers were looking everywhere for ideas and it didn't really seem to matter where they came from. As long as they could be turned into a decent (or not so decent) game, they were, excuse the pun, fair game. *The Hobbit* was released in 1982, being one of the first notable games to be based on a piece of literature. *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* and *I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream* all followed over the years, with one of the most recent examples being TellTale Game's episodic adaptation of *Game Of Thrones* (which is admittedly based largely on the TV series). While we're on the subject of books, let's not



» [Mega Drive] *Aladdin* featured animation by the same artists that had worked on the film.



» [Mega Drive] Disney's approach to the *Aladdin* game is one of the reasons it stood out among its peers.



» [SNES] The war between Mega Drive and SNES really affected *Aladdin*; the former was tougher and had better animation, the latter had better graphics and was easier.

Selected TIMELINE

1981 – 1982 – 1983 – 1984 – 1985 – 1986 – 1987 – 1988

1981: TRON: DEADLY DISCS
■ Many forget how *Tron* was produced by Disney Studios, and as one of the first non-superhero licensed games on console it was clear the company was keen on gaming.

1982: E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL
■ The disappointment that is *E.T.* was released on Atari 2600, beginning a history of terrible licensed games.

1982: STAR WARS: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK
■ The first *Star Wars* licensed videogame is released, a decent if uninspired *Defender* clone with Luke taking on AT-ATs on Hoth.

1986: BATMAN
■ This was the first videogame outing for the Caped Crusader, and one of Ocean Software's recurring fixtures in its ever-growing stable of licensed games.





» [SNES] The *Alien* – and to a lesser extent *Predator* – franchise has been eviscerated by numerous licensed games across a range of genres.

forget that the movie adaptations of *James Bond* have been converted into numerous games with varying degrees of success, starting with *James Bond 007* in 1983 and peaking with *GoldenEye 007* in 1997. Even food has been fair game over the years, with videogames based on everything from M&Ms to Quavers, Skips, Pepsi and even McDonalds all getting in on the act. Toys have also had their fair share of licences over the years, with varying degrees of success. Barbie, Hot Wheels, Action Man, Bratz, My Little Pony, GI Joe, Zoids, the list is endless. Indeed there are enough Barbie games alone to warrant an extensive history feature, but we're unsure if anyone would actually read it. *Micro Machines* is arguably one of the most successful toy licences, both in terms of recognition, sales and gameplay quality, but it's long been retired, with the last game appearing in 2006. Ultimately, while there have been all sorts of licences turned into videogames, those based on films and TV series are typically the most popular ones, possibly due to them being the most recognisable, it's important to remember, though, just what the terms 'lisensed game' actually covers.

As the NES era blended into the SNES era and Nintendo and Sega's feud really began to heat up, it became clear to licensors that a good branded game could be so much more than *added value* – it could be another source of revenue. It helped that console gaming was brimming with side-scrolling platformers, enabling opportunities for brands to simply and easily recreate their own equivalent licensed titles on. Capcom's 1989 *DuckTales* stood as a shining example after having been well received both commercially and critically – even if it was just a smart reworking of the developer's own *Mega Man* franchise. And though it wasn't Disney's first foray into gaming, the achievements of *DuckTales* did act as a catalyst for the behemoth animation studio. From *The Jungle Book* to *The Lion King*, *Aladdin* to *Quackshot* or *Mickey Mouse*'s own *Castle/ Land/ World Of Illusion* series, Disney's tirade of platformers during the period was numerous. More than anything, however, they were – by and large – great games, too, with many fondly remembered to this day. "Disney was an example of a great licensor to work with," says David, "because of the access we had. Sometimes you feel like it's 'us and them' when you work with a licensor, and that you have essentially brand police telling you what you can't do rather than helping you do something amazing. With Disney it was very much helping you do something amazing. They had a lot behind it and had a lot of personal credibility I suppose in the success of it, and so we got unprecedented access to the Disney machine. And that worked amazingly well, though that's not always the case as you can imagine."

After moving to the States to help turn Virgin Interactive's US offices into a development studio, David would be given *Aladdin* to work on. The project, which would be for the Mega Drive version, had only five months to be completed in. Even now *Aladdin* remains a classic. So what is the secret considering the small timeframe with the added bother of working alongside a licensor? David claims it was as much Disney's passion for the project as it was the collection of talented developers he had gathered together. Disney Studios' own ▶



DID YOU KNOW?

1 *E.T.* is considered the worst game ever made, but it was actually preceded by an *Indiana Jones* game that played almost exactly the same only a month before it.

2 Nintendo created three *Game & Watch* games based on Mickey Mouse, the first in 1981, a second in 1982 (including Donald Duck) and the third in 1984.

3 In the early Eighties many big licensors maintained a gaming division, where they would look for ways to implement their brand into videogames.

4 *Darkstalkers* originally began its life as a fighting game based on the classic Universal Studios horror films, a fact you can spot in many of the character's designs.

5 There have been a total of 32 games based in Middle-Earth, making it one of the most licensed fictional universes in gaming history.

6 Stainless Games had intended to create a game based on the *Mad Max* franchise, but was unable to secure a deal. The resultant game became *Carmageddon*.

7 There have been 225 licensed Disney games over the years, with games focusing on or solely featuring Mickey Mouse numbering 52 of those.

1989

DUCKTALES

■ Capcom's *DuckTales* is one of the most adored NES games, proving that licensed games could be just as great as unlicensed ones.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

■ It was on the NES that the era of licensed games really started to take off, and though many disagree on the quality of *TMNT* it sold well enough to be remembered by many.

1990

1991

BART VS.THE SPACE MUTANTS

■ With Bartmania in full effect there's perhaps no surprise that Fox would want to bring the character to gaming.

1992

1993

COOL SPOT

■ Virgin Interactive's *Cool Spot* is perhaps the greatest example of how a great game is the most important part of making a licensed game.

ALADDIN

■ Because of its work on *Cool Spot*, Virgin worked with Sega (who had earned the rights to make Disney games) to create *Aladdin* – one of the most well-loved licensed games.

1994

1995

1996

TOY STORY

■ Before it found success with its *Lego* games, Traveller's Tales worked on this impressive looking platformer, which featured extremely impressive visuals.

1997



■ [PS1] By the time the PSOne was released, superhero games had become a separate concept to licensed games – each release avoiding the skepticism that branded games had.



LICENSE TO SELL

Building a better videogame licence

When you're talking about modern videogame licences, few have had as much success as those based upon Denmark's most famous building block. Although *Lego* videogames have existed since the late Nineties in various forms, it wasn't until Traveller's Tales created its winning formulae of cooperative play and stud collecting that the licence truly came of age. The brand has helped Traveller's Tales become one of the UK's most successful software developers, with the company typically covering popular film franchises such as *Star Wars, Harry Potter, Indiana Jones* and *Jurassic Park*.

- **56** LEGO GAMES ARE AVAILABLE
- **21** LICENSED LEGO GAMES
- **30** TRAVELLER'S TALES LEGO GAMES
- **4** STAR WARS LEGO GAMES
- **2** MIDDLE-EARTH LEGO GAMES
- **4** HARRY POTTER LEGO GAMES
- **4** LEGO NINJAGO GAMES
- **5** COMIC-BASED LEGO GAMES

▶ president, then Jeffrey Katzenberg, devoted time to overseeing the development, with David and his team having to present the game's design to one of the most important men in media at the time. "It was just the fact that he wanted to pour over these game designs," adds David, "you can just imagine how busy a man he was. He would very regularly take phonecalls in our meetings."

Though Disney's platformers stood out as some of the best examples of licensed games during the Nineties, they weren't the only ones. It was the golden age of gaming, after all, and big brands wanted their slice of the pie. Franchises like *Batman* and *Superman* made returning appearances in videogames, joined by *Spider-Man* and *X-Men*. *Tom And Jerry, Ren And Stimpy* and the *Loony Toons* saw themselves gamified, as did *Tintin, The Smurfs* and more



adventures for the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Films remained a staple, too, as did the prevalent belief that a film tie-in often meant the game was a dud. Indiana Jones continued to make appearances – his LucasArts adventure games being the most noteable – while the likes of *Home Alone, Lethal Weapon* and *True Lies* all got converted to the videogame format. It was a hectic time for licensors, where even the likes of TV game shows – such as *Jeopardy, Wheel Of Fortune* or *The Crystal Maze* – were finding themselves hurriedly brought over to gaming on one platform or another. Developers were more than happy to seek out these opportunities, too.

The influx of licensed titles naturally led to its own downfall, however. With so many disparate franchises being tacked onto games – and often without any real effort or concern – the interest quickly began to dissipate. Things were shaken up all the more by the move to 3D, too. While sports games would look to enlist a known figure in a bid to ironically add integrity to the product, the rest struggled as the N64 and PlayStation began to move away from the 2D platformers that had proven so popular on the previous generation. The struggles of 3D development put many licensors off – the gain didn't always outweigh the cost, even when factoring brand recognition into it. This had two effects: firstly, the exciting 'new thing' that gaming had represented during the 16-bit era had waned – now it was an industry like any other, and that meant fewer licensors saw the need to expand into the market. Secondly, those that did try to break into gaming found themselves limiting the initial spend, and as the cost of development began to rise this only ever led to disaster.

It wasn't all bereft of quality, though. Many film licences finally found their feet alongside gaming, especially as the perspective shift had begun to allow for much more cinematic experiences. The *Die Hard Trilogy* and the *Alien Trilogy* are two particularly important examples of PlayStation film tie-ins, if not for the success they achieved at retail then for the effort its respective developers put into capturing the essence of their licences. Comic book characters had, at this point, become a staple fixture for the industry, a subgenre in

1998 – 1999 – 2000 – 2001 – 2002 – 2003 – 2004 – 2005

1999: SUPERMAN 64

■ Rated as one of the worst games on N64 – probably *ever* – *Superman 64* was an awful use of a license. So loved was the brand, however, that it still became a top seller during its month of release.

2002: KINGDOM HEARTS

■ In a surprising twist, it seemed that a combination of *Final Fantasy* and Disney – somehow – worked, and built one of Square's most loved franchises.

2005: LEGO STAR WARS

■ It had the misfortune to be based on the dull second trilogy of films, but this was still a huge success for Traveller's Tales and helped create the template that all of the company's later *Lego* games would utilise.

and of itself that somehow managed to avoid the skepticism that invaded most licensed titles – and perhaps due a Bluffer's Guide of its own. All the same there were just as many impressive releases as failures; *Spider-Man*, for example, captured the sensation of swinging around New York as Peter Parker almost flawlessly – for its time, of course – while *Superman 64* was quite the opposite, failing to imitate everything about the Kryptonian but his likeness. At this point licensed games dwindled down, with licensors having since lost the excitement of the previous generation of consoles. In most cases licensed games were targeted at children – Barbie had six releases on PlayStation, for example – and sadly weren't compelling games in their own rights. Most came from films, examples such as *Chicken Run* or the abhorrent *A Bug's Life* – the latter of which managed to sell well off the back of the film alone. Disney, too, maintained its assault on videogames, with each of its films finding their way on consoles. Though they varied in quality, none were much more than passable examples of the genre – each utilising their respective brands in a very one-dimensional fashion.

By the time the PS2 rolled around, the sense that a licensed game meant an inferior one permeated through the industry. There were exceptions to the rule but in most cases they suffered the same fate as those on the PlayStation. Barbie, Disney films and a slew of action movies were all dragged kicking and screaming onto the PS2, all ending up rather uninspired.

There was, however, one stand out Disney venture, and a peculiar mix at that: *Kingdom Hearts* was released in 2002, a Squaresoft title that blended *Final Fantasy* with Disney characters. It was an unusual combination, but one of the rare times that the PS2 saw a great use of a licence, with Squaresoft making smart use of the Disney's characters. Sadly, few matched *Kingdom Hearts* inventive quality, chief among them being the return of *The Simpsons*. Fox had gained renewed vigour for gaming, and after *The Simpsons Wrestling* had tried to match



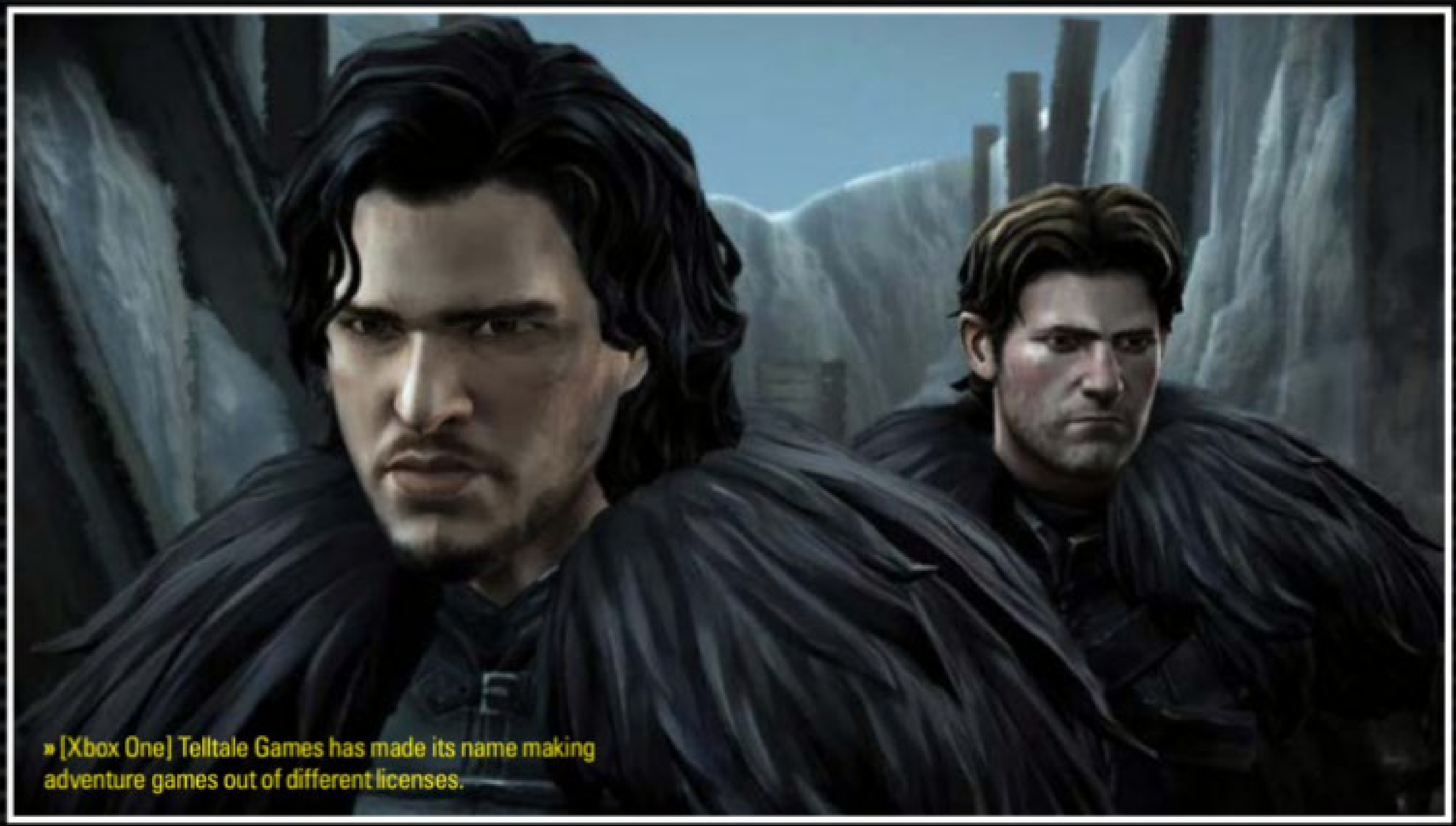
» [PS3] *The Scott Pilgrim* film and comic book tie-in wasn't nearly as awful as many expected.



» [PS3] Mickey's never vanished from the games industry, though his recent games rarely receive praise.

WWF Attitude's sales, it seemed Fox's attitude to licensing the cartoon family was to capitalise on the success of many, many better titles before it. *Road Rage* was *Crazy Taxi*, *Simpsons Skateboarding* was *Tony Hawk's* and *Hit And Run* was an attempt to mimic *Grand Theft Auto*'s success. All awful, and key examples of the sorts of gaming you could expect from licensed titles on PS2. It wasn't until the PS3 and Xbox 360 era that any *good* licensed games reappeared. Rocksteady's *Batman: Arkham* series remains an example of what a love of a franchise can do for videogames. Telltale Games' work on *The Walking Dead* and *Game Of Thrones*, too, prove that not every license needs to be turned into a first-person shooter or a platformer.

But the truth remains: these were all exceptions, rather than the rule – and far more horrific film tie-ins and branded kids games were released than those that made a compelling argument for licensors. As smartphone gaming splits the demographics, however, many of the culprits of the industries most unnecessary licensed games – Disney and *The Simpsons* in particular – have made the switch, choosing instead to focus on apps rather than infiltrating the gaming industry. Dare we say that we are witnessing the end of lazy licensed games and welcoming the rise of great, branded games? *



» [Xbox One] Telltale Games has made its name making adventure games out of different licenses.

THE WARRIORS
■ Released 26 years after the film came, this was a clear case of the developer having a passion for the licence rather than working towards a tie-in release date.

THE WALKING DEAD
■ Though Telltale Games had worked on many licensed games before, with *The Walking Dead* it found a template that worked and has since utilised it for many other licences.

2006 – 2007 – 2008 – 2009 – 2010 – 2011 – 2012 – 2013 – 2014

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM
■ *Batman* wasn't well known when it came to licensing, but Rocksteady's love and understanding of the brand enabled them to make a game worthy of the licence.

ALIEN ISOLATION
■ There have been some great *Alien* games released over the years, but few were as creepy and effective as this startling effort by Creative Assembly.





Airball

» RETROREVIVAL

ISOMETRIC SHENANIGANS ON THE ATARI ST

» ATARI ST » MICRODEAL » 1987

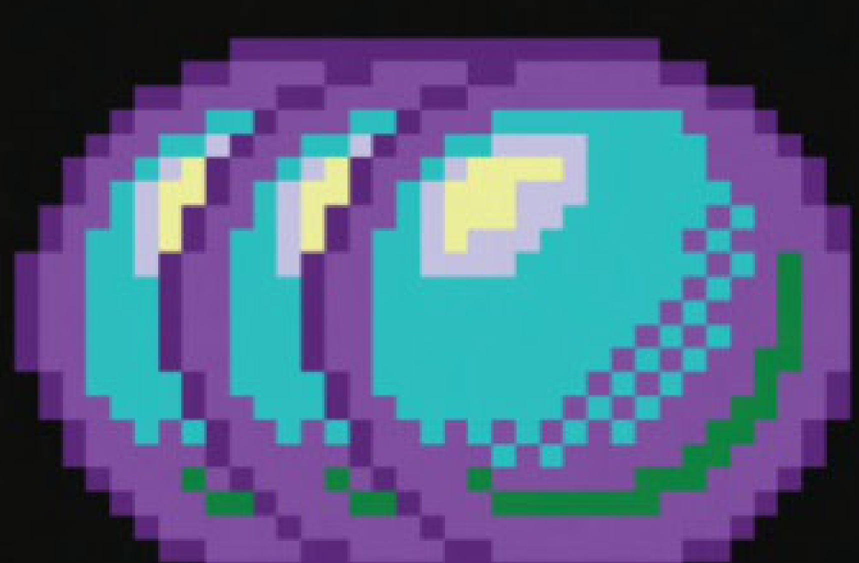
We love videogames based around interesting gameplay mechanics. Take *Airball* for example: you play a boy who gets transformed into the titular object after a wizard gets fed up with his trespassing. You start off in a pump room and must navigate 249 more rooms in order to find the spell book that will turn you back into a real boy.

Sadly, the ball you've now been transformed into has a slow air leak meaning you must reinflate yourself in the available pump rooms. Unfortunately, said pump rooms are few and far between, and even when you do happen to reach them there's a chance you'll burst by injecting too much air into yourself.

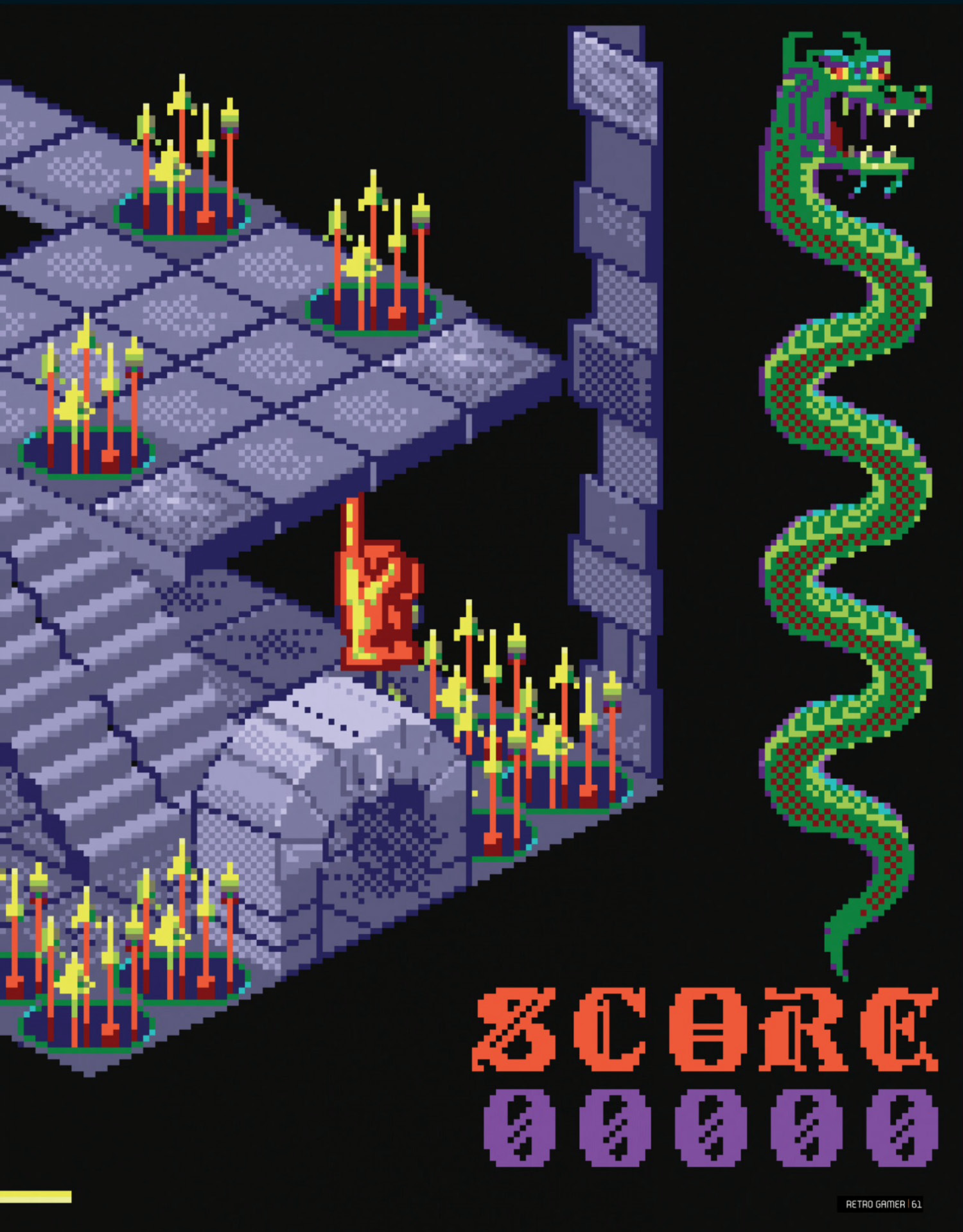
The small number of pump rooms available means that you have to move quickly in order to navigate *Airball*'s 250 rooms. It's a great concept, instantly recalling the likes of *Spindizzy* and *Marble Madness*, but it's let down by the rather skittish nature of your ball. Regardless of whether you play with keyboard, joystick or mouse, the controls aren't exactly as tight as we'd like them to be, meaning that it's easy to make mistakes or catch yourself on the occational dangerous object.

The fiddly controls are a pity as *Airball* features some genuinely solid level design, instantly recalling the clever level layouts of *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8*. Certain rooms are deviously constructed and often require lateral thinking in order to solve them, and it only gets trickier to work them out when you're fighting an ever-decreasing timer.

Airball isn't the greatest ST game by any means, but it remains a challenging isometric adventure that will test both your wits and your reflexes. *






SCORE
00000

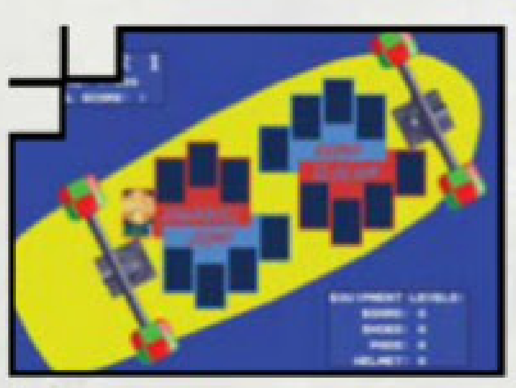


720°

Back in the Eighties Atari were never afraid to try something new and one of its greatest success stories was the arcade game 720°. Kieren Hawken grabs his deck and hits the park to find why it's so rad

Crazes come and go, some last and some don't, but some come back and stick around for longer making a real impression. The skill of any commercial enterprise is to work out which ones aren't going to be just a passing fad and capitalise on them. Much of this is a gamble, of course, but one that Atari was prepared to take when they came up with *720°*, the very first videogame to focus on the extreme sport of skateboarding. The game was released to arcade audiences in 1986 to widespread critical acclaim, and quickly became a top earner for the California-based company. The name, *720°*, refers to the (then) ultimate trick, turning full circle off a ramp, not once but twice – thus spinning round a whole 720 degrees. So was programmer Paul Kwinn worried that he, and the rest of the team, were working on something that was nothing more than a passing fad? "It was indeed pretty popular," Paul remembers, "and since it hadn't been done as a videogame yet, that allowed us the chance to be the first, and grab anyone interested in both skateboarding and videogames. I don't think it was a difficult sell – at least it had some sort of tie-in with popular culture. Many games of the time didn't have that."

The whole game is set inside the fictional Skate City. Contained within this skater's haven are all sorts of ramps and ridges to jump off and perform tricks. There are also a number of hazards to avoid, too, such as cars and kids on bikes. The key element of Skate City, however, is the four skate parks that lurk on its boundries. You can gain entry into these by buying tickets, you earn money by performing tricks or collecting the notes that you see passing in the breeze. These parks contain four distinct events: Slalom, Downhill, Ramps and Jumps. The idea of the game is to earn a gold medal in each of these disciplines, but what we didn't mention is that you have a strict time limit to make it to each of these parks, meaning you can't just endlessly perform tricks to earn lots of money. If time runs out before making it to a park then you hear the scream of "SKATE OR DIE!" and a swarm of killer bees comes after you! There are also a number of shops within Skate City that allow you to buy various upgrades that will improve your skater's

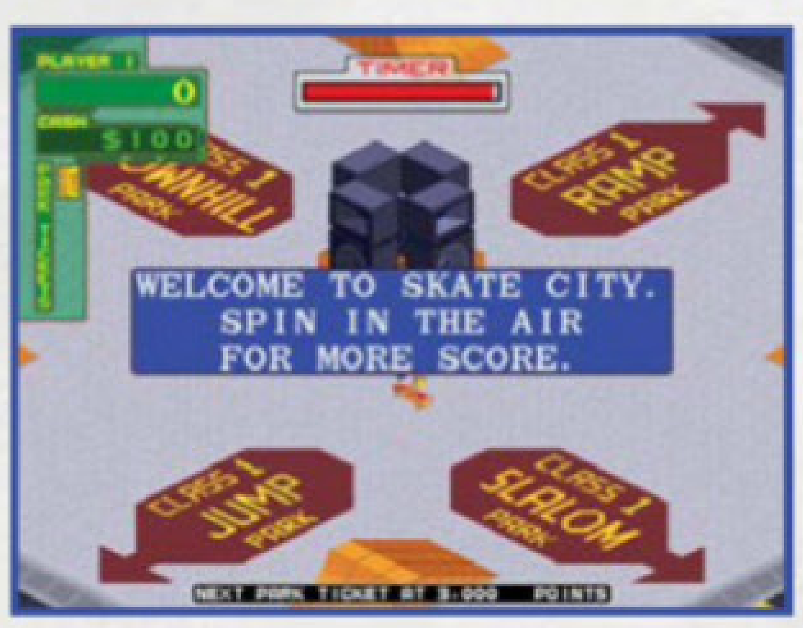


IN THE KNOW

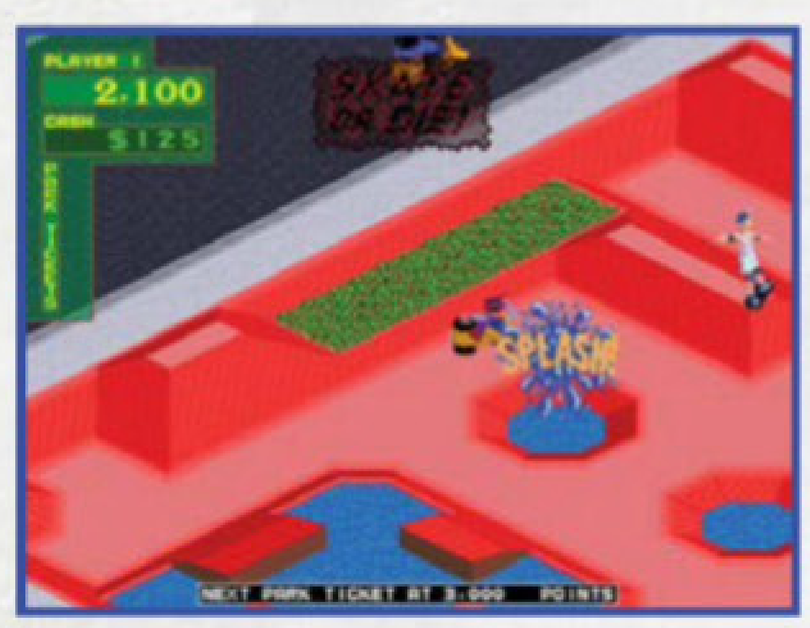
- » **PUBLISHER:** ATARI GAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** ATARI GAMES
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- » **GENRE:** SPORTS



» [Arcade] The game starts off by allowing you to choose your level of skill.



» [Arcade] At the start of the game handy signs tell you where to go and hints appear on the screen.



» [Arcade] Watch out for the hazards including water and other skaters, crashing costs you valuable time!

abilities; such as new shoes, better skateboards and pads.

One of the most innovative features of *720°* is that, unlike pretty much every arcade game of the time, it doesn't require you to keep pumping the game with credits to continue. A skilled player can earn the right to continue by amassing enough points. So were Paul's bosses at Atari worried that people would become too good and the game wouldn't earn any money? "Oh we weren't really the first to come up with that idea. *Centipede*, for example, gave you extra lives for points," Paul explains. "We *wanted* people to play longer if they were experts at the game. It was all about tuning and setting it up so that even the worst player would get a good enough experience that they'd want to put more quarters in to continue, while even the best player would find it hard to play the whole game without putting in more money. I always thought it was fun when the bees came out. When you could pull off those few extra tricks with bees on your tail and rush into a skate park just before they caught you, you felt like a hero."

While it was nothing new to arcade gamers of the time, having already been seen in games such as *Paperboy* and *Crystal Castles*, the isometric visuals of *720°* were one of its most striking features. The viewpoint doesn't seem the most obvious for a skateboarding game, but it works incredibly well, so we asked Paul how that came about. "Well one thing you need to keep in mind was that we didn't have polygons at the time," Paul explains. "We didn't even have the scaling sprites of slightly later games like *Pit-Fighter*. So it pretty much needed to be some form of isometric viewpoint. Top-down is pretty boring looking, and would have been bad for a game with so much vertical movement. I suppose we could have had the camera look down one axis, with the other being across the screen, but the very free movement of the skateboarding gameplay worked better in the perspective we used." The bees also became a key part of the game and interestingly these same foes had been used in two previous ▶

"I don't think it was a particularly difficult sell – at least it had some sort of tie-in with popular culture. Many games of the time didn't have that" Paul Kwinn

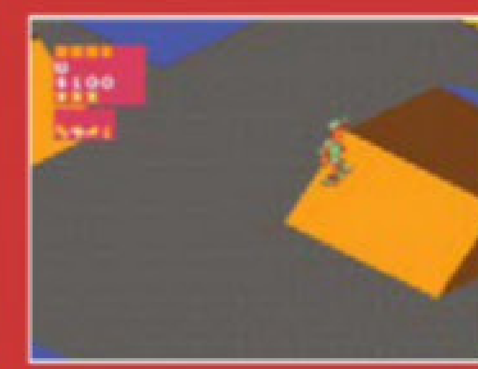


» [Arcade] There are lots of ramps dotted around Skate City that can you can use to perform cool tricks.

HOME CONVERSIONS

The best and worst ports of Atari's popular skateboarding game





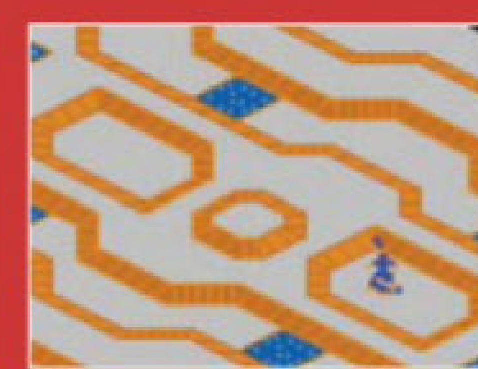
COMMODORE 64

■ Strangely, there are actually two versions for the Commodore 64, a European version by US Gold and a North American version by Mindscape. We preferred Chris Butler's version for US Gold personally as it looks more like the arcade game.

NES

■ The NES iteration by Mindscape is rather good all things considered. It plays at a great lick, has all the events and some great music, too. Our only complaint was that the actual skate park looks a little bit drab graphically.



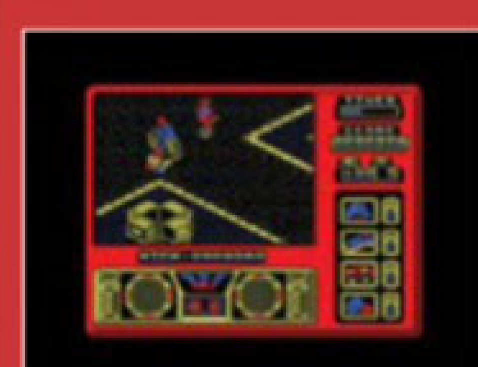


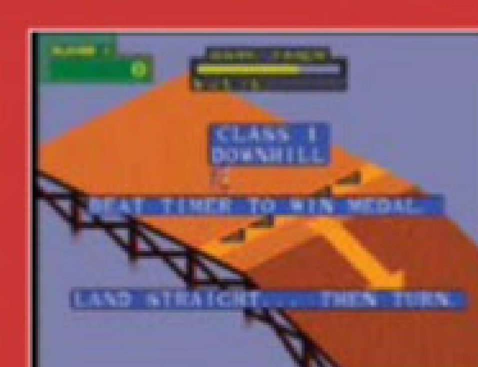
ZX SPECTRUM

■ The Spectrum version was highly rated as it plays a great, albeit monochrome, version of the arcade game. As it was designed with 48k in mind it doesn't have music but it came with an audiotape that featured the complete soundtrack.

GAME BOY COLOR

■ This is the only handheld version of the coin-op to be released. The whole game is here along with a decent attempt at the music, but the graphics are too small and poorly defined making it a hard to see what is going on.





AMSTRAD CPC

■ The Amstrad CPC port seems to use most of the code from the Spectrum version but adds in colour and great music on the title screen. This version also came with an audiotape of the soundtrack thanks to the kind folk at US Gold.

MIDWAY COLLECTIONS

■ *720°* has appeared on a number of different Midway arcade collections in emulated form, meaning the game can be enjoyed as it should be by owners of the PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC, PS3 and Xbox 360.





» [Arcade] You can use the money you earn to buy upgrades from the various shops in Skate City.

» [Arcade] Remember that the roads are dangerous! Too many crashes and it's game over.



» [Arcade] The handy map icons bring up the whole of Skate City on the screen so you can see where you are.



▶ Atari coin-ops, *Paperboy* and *Crystal Castles*, we just had to ask Paul if that was intentional. "Yes, we took the bees from *Paperboy*, which the core of the team had worked on before *720°*. As far as I know, there's no intended reference to *Crystal Castles* with the bees or the look. Bees are certainly convenient as a 'hurry up or die' element, though, since they can fly and go through bushes or fences, in order to get to the player wherever he goes. So it may have just been a case of parallel evolution."

It wasn't just the way *720°* looked that made it unique, though; the cabinet design was also stand out feature. With its boom box speakers, cool artwork and unique controller, *720°* really stood out in the murky smoke filled arcades of the era. Paul explains how this all came about: "cabinet design was handled by a separate department, although Dave Ralston, the lead artist and designer, may have had some input. I do remember the team loving that cabinet though. The music was provided by all three of the members of Atari Games audio team (Hal Canon, Earl Vickers and Brad Fuller). They enjoyed the opportunity to make some different music from what was standard at the time; I suppose you could say it was part of the plan from the beginning. More than with most games, the attitude was a critical part of the game's presentation, we had to make you feel part of that rebellious skater subculture." In fact, the audio became such a key part of the game that when UK publisher US Gold converted it to the 8-bit computers of the time they included an audiotape of the arcade game's tunes to make it more faithful.

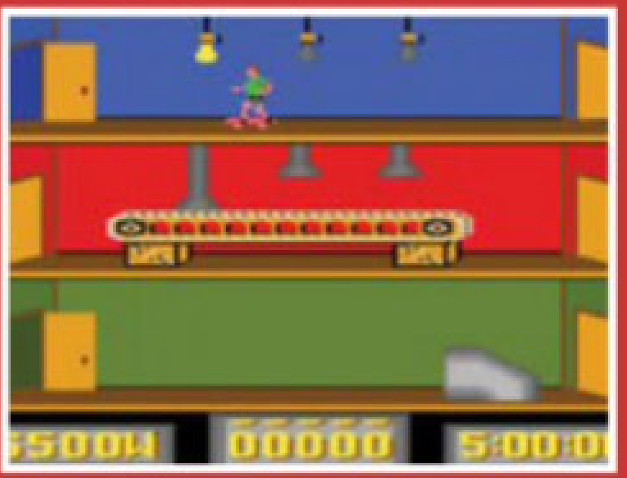
It's actually quite surprising that *720°* didn't get more home conversions, but it arrived just as the 16-bit computers were coming in and the console craze was still in its infancy. It saw ports to the Spectrum, Amstrad, NES, C64 (twice) and a much later Game Boy Color conversion (see boxout). The popularity of the game also led to it being included in emulated form on many of the later Midway Arcade compilations. So what were Paul's views on the home versions of his game? "I did play some home versions a little." He tells us, "the main thing was that the weird rotating joystick controller couldn't really be emulated,

CRASH & BURN A Brief History Of Skateboarding Games











CALIFORNIA GAMES 1987

■ Although it's essentially a multi-event sports game, the half-pipe event of California Games is one of the most popular parts of this classic by Epyx that has seen conversions to pretty much every machine under the sun.

SKATE BOARDIN' 1987

■ Considered the first skateboarding game on a home console, this title by David '*Pitfall*' Crane is an impressive effort for the then ten year old Atari 2600. See how many tricks you can do before the time runs out.

SKATE OR DIE 1988

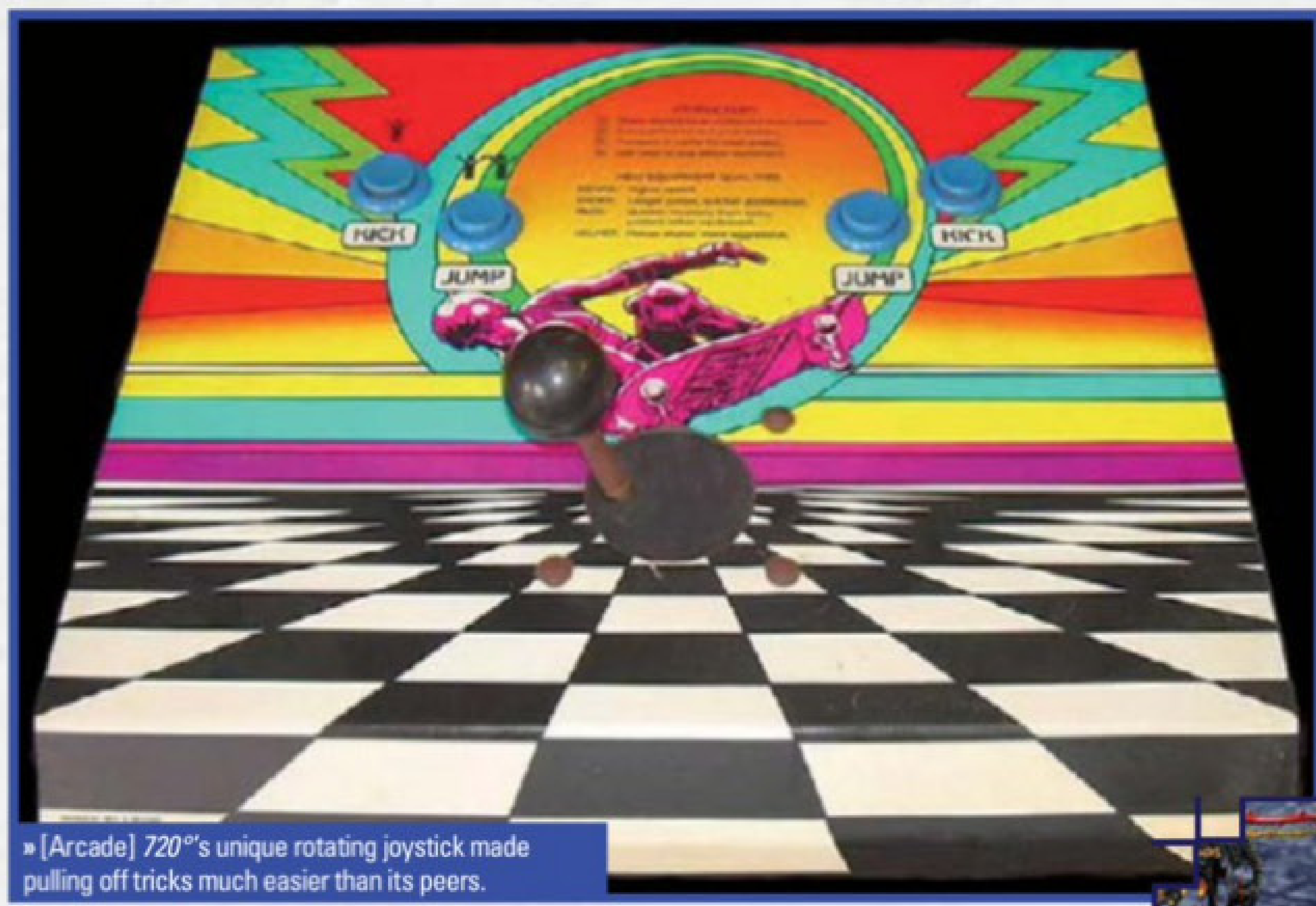
■ Stealing a line from *720°*, much to the annoyance of the Atari programmers, *Skate Or Die* would become the first title in a rather long history of skateboarding games courtesy of Electronic Arts.

SUPER SKATEBOARDIN' 1988

■ A sequel to the Atari 2600 game, this was released for the Atari 7800. This isn't a skateboarding game, it plays like an adventure with you skating around a factory completing tasks.

SKATEBOARD JOUST 1989

■ Clearly released just to capitalise on the skateboarding craze of the time, this budget release by Silverbird for the ZX Spectrum has shamelessly little to do with the sport at all.



» [Arcade] *720°*'s unique rotating joystick made pulling off tricks much easier than its peers.

so it never felt the same to play it on a home system." One of the biggest mysteries regarding the home versions of the game is what happened to the heavily previewed Atari Lynx version, which had all the potential to be the best of the lot. D. Scott Williamson, who programmed *S.T.U.N. Runner*, *Toki* and *RoadBlasters* for the Lynx, clearly remembers the game being coded. "Lynx *720°* was in development while I was there and the coin op was even in my office," he tells us. Matt Scott, who did the music for it, found some code recently and sent them to me. Sadly it just turned out to be a demo of just the skateboard character in the centre of the screen who was rotatable with the joypad." The hunt for the Lynx version continues and the mystery of why it was never released remains unsolved.

> **"We built a full-sized half-pipe in the warehouse at the back of the Atari building and then brought in a bunch of good skaters for several sessions to watch what they could do"** Paul Kwinn



Surely a wacky game like *720°* must have been a lot of fun to make, though? "Yes!" Paul exclaims. "We built a full-sized half-pipe in the warehouse at the back of the Atari building and then brought in a bunch of good skaters for several sessions to watch what they could do. Then for the Amusement & Music Operators Association (AMOA) show in Chicago, the big annual convention for the industry back then, we had a smaller half-pipe built, maybe five feet high, put it in our booth surrounded by chain-link fence and hired skaters to put on demonstrations during the show. [It was] one of the more attention-grabbing things on the show floor!" Making such an innovative game can't have been without its challenges, too, so it would have been remiss for us to have not ask Paul about those. "It was my very first game, explains Paul. "Probably the most interesting technical bit was that the game was written in a language named Bliss. It was a DEC (Digital Equipment Corp) proprietary language that I've never worked in before. The processor was a DEC T-11, and we worked on DEC VAX minicomputers for editing and building, and DEC had a cross-compiler that would make T-11 code on the VAX. That way we could easily edit, manage and build our code on the VAX, then download it to the T-11 to test things.



» [Arcade] When your time runs out a swarm of killer bees come after you – it's skate or die!

One thing we really wanted to know was what the *720°* team thought about the game inspiring another very popular skateboarding game in Electronic Arts' *Skate Or Die*, which even goes as far as using *720°*'s catchphrase as its title. "It was slightly annoying to us," admits a slightly miffed Paul. "I suppose that's inevitable – if you make something successful, people will imitate you. I think *Skate Or Die* was something that we had borrowed from the skate culture, too, an expression of the idea that skating was the most worthwhile thing in life." We had to ask Paul if he is pleased that *720°* is so well regarded and remembered by gamers everywhere. "Of course!" Paul elates, "it was my first game, and the fact that it's still remembered nearly 30 years later, is pretty cool!" ✱

Our special thanks goes to Paul Kwinn and D. Scott Williamson.

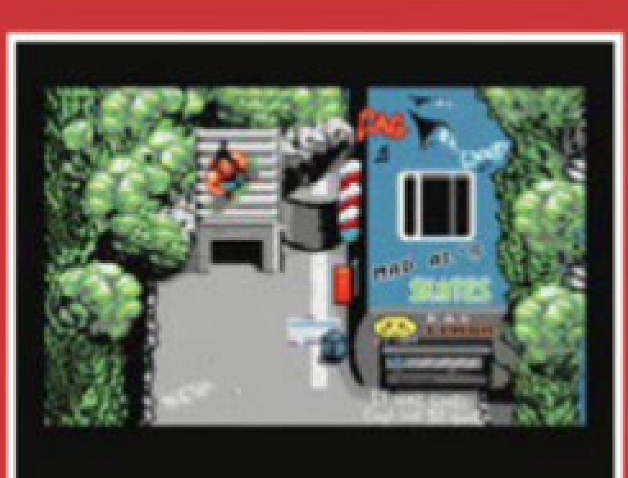


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

PAPERBOY
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1985

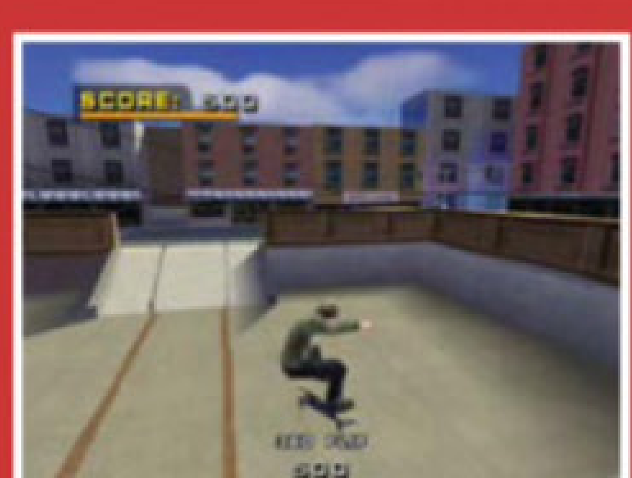
APB
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1987

PRIMAL RAGE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1994



SKATE TRIBE 1990

■ Winner of the 1989 Mandarin Games Competition, this fun title for the Atari ST was coded completely in STOS. It's a top viewed affair where you skate down the screen avoiding obstacles, doing tricks and collecting the money.



TONY HAWK'S SERIES 1999

■ The craze didn't kick off again until the late Nineties and the arrival of the *Tony Hawk's* games. This series first started out on the PlayStation and has spawned nearly 20 games!



EVOLUTION SKATEBOARDING 2002

■ This game was Konami's attempt to jump in on the popularity of the sport and owed a lot to the *Tony Hawk's* titles with its licensed professional skateboarders and music.



SKATE SERIES 2007

■ Another popular series of games, these were released by EA to compete with the *Tony Hawk's* games. The first game was praised upon release for its realism, excellent controls and licensed grunge soundtrack.



OLLIOLLI 2014

■ Bringing the genre right up to the present day, *OlliOlli* is one of the most popular and addictive downloadable games released and has already spawned an equally terrific sequel which is reviewed on page 102.

Ivan Stewart's Ironman Super Off Road

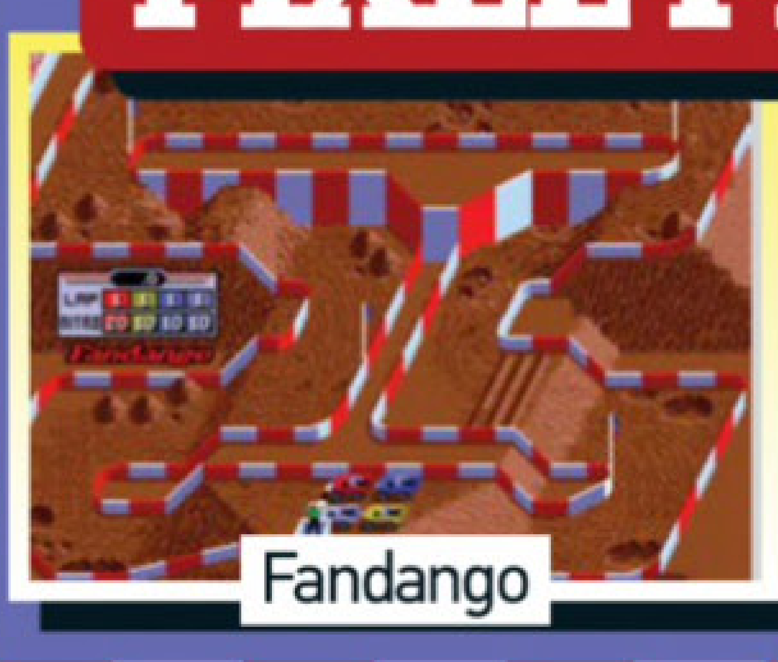
You didn't have to be a fan of loud American truck racing or know Ironman from Adam to enjoy Super Off Road. Martyn Carroll looks back at the top-down racer that brought multiplayer fun back to the arcades

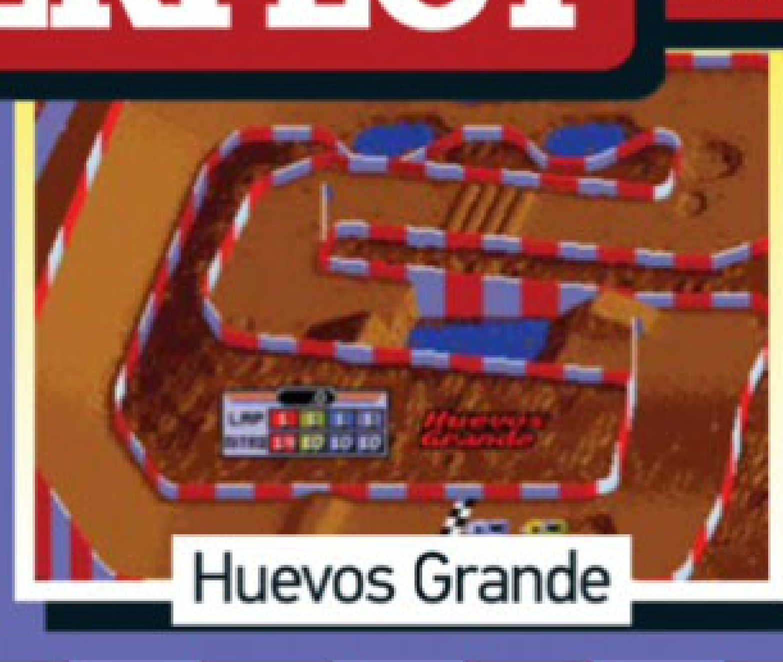
A mischievous note that read, "warning to the competition: the road just got a little rougher," on the promotional flyer for *Super Off Road* was clearly aimed at one competitor in particular. Atari Games' long-running *Sprint* series was the king of top-down racers and the fantastic *Super Sprint* had shown that there was still mileage in this modest style of game, however, by 1989 Atari was struggling to inject new life into the formula. The seventh and final *Sprint* game, *Badlands*, featured armoured cars in a post-apocalyptic setting and the result was unexciting and charmless. Atari had misplaced the fun factor somewhere along the way. In contrast, Leland Corporation had a riot on its hands with *Super Off Road*.

The *Sprint* games were graceful affairs – your cars would glide around the track as if on a polished surface. *Super Off Road* was much more *tactile*. Courses featured bumps and jumps and hills and troughs, and the tiny trucks would bounce around the track like Hexbugs as they jostled for position. The slightly skewed top-down perspective and the clever way in which the trucks connected with the track really made the action pop off the screen. This was ▶

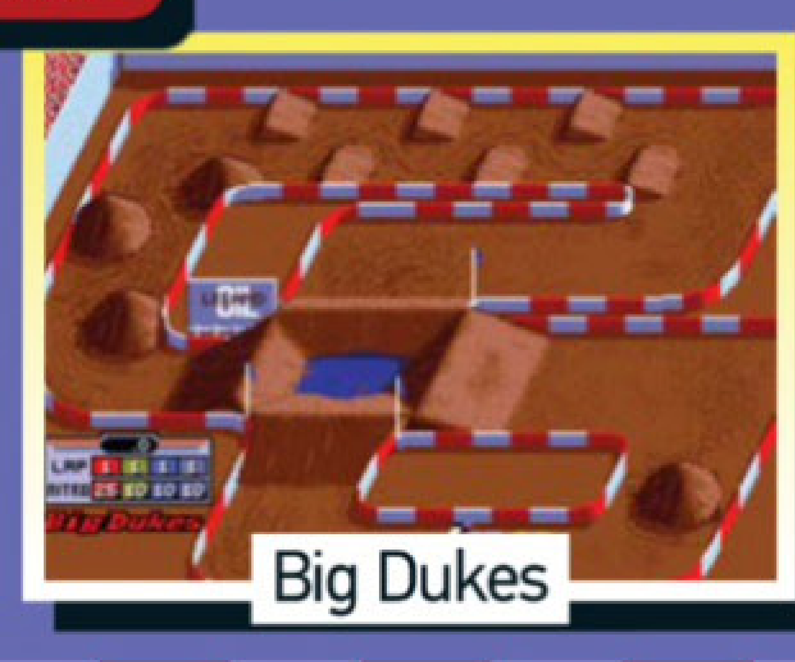
PIXEL PERFECT

The awesome tracks of Super Off Road


Fandango


Huevos Grande


Sidewinder

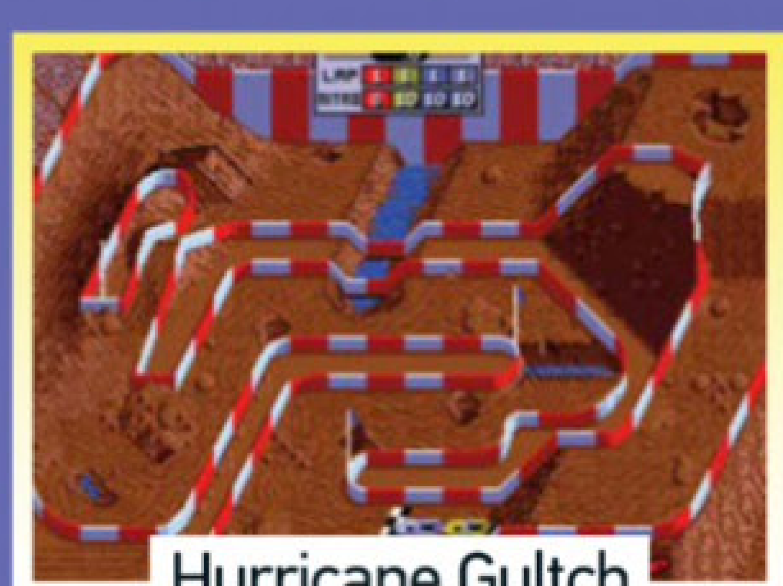

Big Dukes



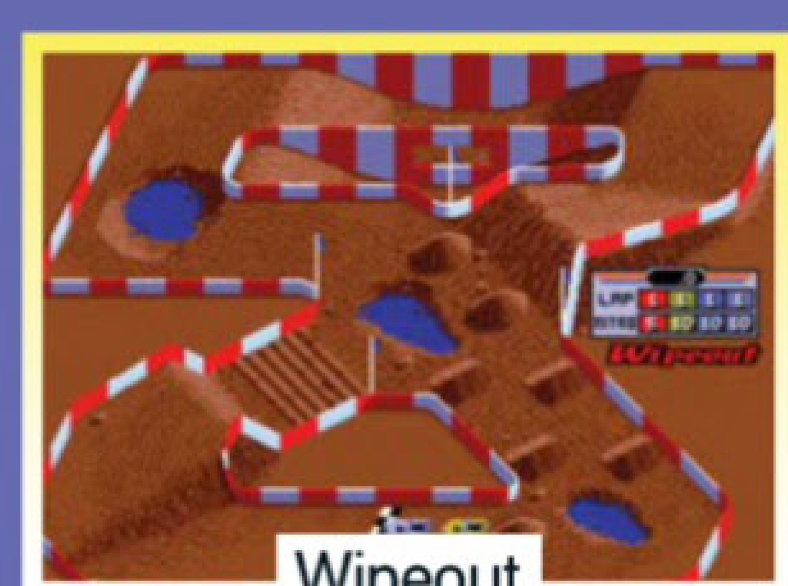
» [Arcade] Crossroads are rarely an uneventful occurrence in *Super Off Road*.

"The full-sized cab featured three steering wheels so a trio of friends could crowd in and compete"


Blaster


Hurricane Gultch


Cliffhanger


Wipeout



» Following numerous race successes Ivan Stewart would find new fame in videogames.

POLE POSITION

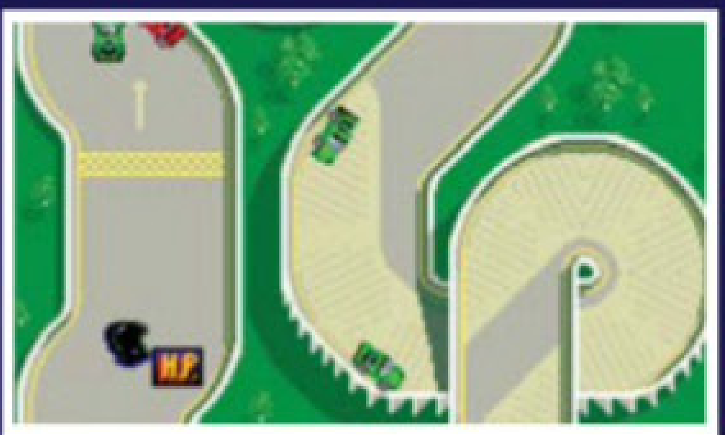
Five other top-down racers that traded paint with Super Off Road in the arcades

SUPER SPRINT 1986



■ Atari resurrected its old *Sprint* series with this classic update that heped to breathe new life into the top-down racer. The older games experimented with the number of players, from one up to eight, but *Super Sprint* established that three was indeed the magic number.

REDLINE RACER 1987



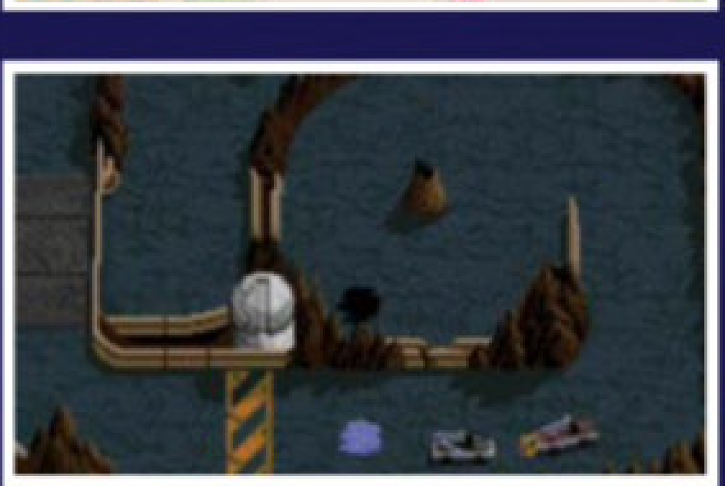
■ Clearly inspired by *Super Sprint*, this circuit racer served as the forerunner to *Super Off Road*. Some of the tracks included banked corners which affected the control of your vehicle – a feature that the development team would bring to the fore in *Super Off Road*.

HOT ROD 1988



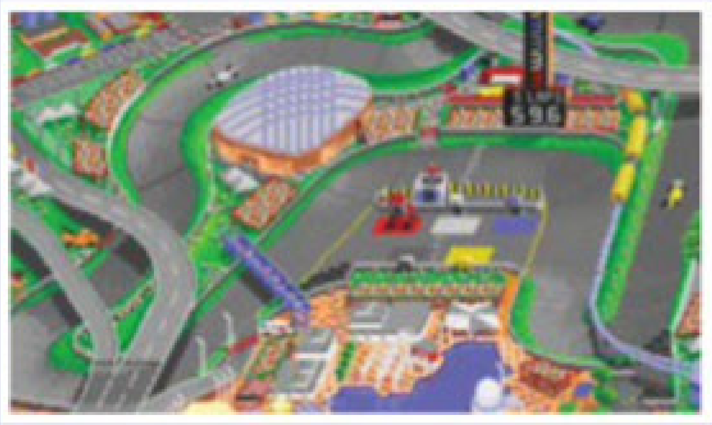
■ Not the best-known Sega coin-op, and it is far from the best, *Hot Rod* was nonetheless an rather interesting departure from its more famous 3D racers. This scrolling top-down racer supported up to four players and it featured a welcome large, high-res monitor.

BADLANDS 1989



■ *Super Sprint* met the ferocity and apocalyptic-ness of *Mad Max* in the final game in Atari's long-running *Sprint* series. This time around, you could shoot your rival racers and steamroll your way to victory. In a nice touch external elements (like bubbling lava) would affect the race.

INDY HEAT 1991



■ Leland's follow-up to *Super Off Road* focused on IndyCar racing and featured 14 tracks based on real-world circuits. By its very nature the game wasn't as much fun as its predecessor – although having to regularly pit for repairs added an exciting and strategic fold to gameplay.

> **"Leland Corporation had a 4WD riot on its hands with Super Off Road"**

certainly no dull Scalextric-style game – it was as crazy as the arena sport on which it was based.

The actual racing format was more conventional. There were four racers who had to complete four laps of eight different courses and the full-sized cab featured three steering wheels so a trio of friends could crowd in and compete. Virtual cash was handed out after each race and these winnings could be used to improve your truck with new tyres, better shocks, engine upgrades, and so on. The key purchase, though, was nitro fuel which provided you with vital speed boosts during the race. It wasn't just a case of boosting around the track, nitro needed to be preserved and only used on straights, big jumps, and when the chequered flag was in sight. It was also possible to convert credits into game cash so you could max out your truck quickly. This was not just a unsavoury feature but it was also pointless as the computer-controlled rivals would simply improve themselves to match you.





» Spot the difference between the SNES and Mega Drive versions. Hint: Nintendo clearly 'had a word'.

Although *Super Off Road* could be described as '*Super Sprint* in the dirt', the game has its origins in a little-known coin-op named *Redline Racer*. This circuit racer was developed by John Morgan at Cinematronics and licensed for release by Tradewest in 1987. Tradewest later acquired Cinematronics and rechristened it Leland Corporation. It was here that John would take *Redline Racer* and completely overhaul it to become *Super Off Road*. Assisting him in this task was Earl Stratton (programming), Steve High (lead graphics) and Sam Powell (music). Eagle-eyed gamers will note that these people lent their names to the computer-controlled trucks you raced against. There was one name that headlined the game, however, and that was off-road racing star Ivan 'Ironman' Stewart.

The story goes that the game was initially developed as a

» [Arcade] The Track Pak courses were more varied, often featuring risky shortcuts.











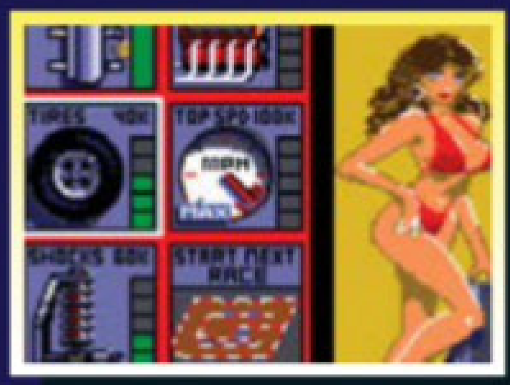
PLAYING TIPS How to get ahead in Super Off Road



1 Boost from the start line. Jostling for position will slow you down, so boost to be in front at the first corner and then maintain your position.



2 Winning by a huge margin will punish you in the next race as your AI rivals will up their game. Try and finish just in front of second place.



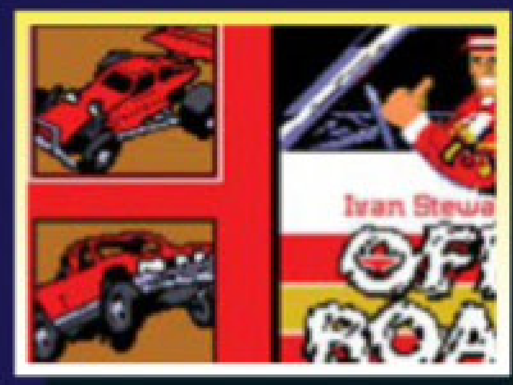
3 Speed and acceleration may seem like obvious upgrades, but it's best to improve control and traction by investing in tyres and shocks.



4 Money and canisters appear on the track during play. Be sure to grab everything, even if it involves venturing off the racing line.



5 Avoid shortcuts on the tracks that have them. They're often tight bottlenecks so take the long way round and boost to make up time.



6 When playing the Track Pak choose the buggy as it features superior acceleration and traction – perfect for the more tougher courses.

dune buggy racer until John and its colleagues bumped into the Ironman himself in a restaurant in California. A deal was struck and the buggies were swapped out for trucks. Ivan Stewart came on board as a technical advisor, although it's fair to say that the game benefitted more from his title of 'Ironman' than anything else.

The coin-op debuted in North American in April 1989, and it was a solid earner for Tradewest, so much so that when takings started to cool off, Leland was tasked with producing an upgrade kit. The 'Track Pak' featured eight brand new courses that were definitely more challenging than the originals with more difficult terrain and tighter channels for bottleneck fun. The dune buggies from the original design were also re-introduced alongside the trucks.

For a single-screen racer with no scrolling, the coin-op's hardware was unsurprisingly modest. It consisted of two Z80 CPUs – one on the main board and one driving a custom graphics board. As a result accurate home conversions were feasible and the rights were acquired by Virgin Games who then tasked respected UK developer Graftgold with bringing the game to home computers. The results were fantastic, with each version doing justice to the original game. The Amiga, Atari ST and PC versions in particular were arcade-perfect or pretty damn close to the coin-op versions. Graftgold later handled the Sega Master System and Game Gear versions, while Rare took up the task of converting it to the NES. SNES and Mega Drive versions soon followed which integrated both the original game and the additional Track Pak upgrade.

» [Arcade] Improving your car is vital if you wanted to compete in the later events.



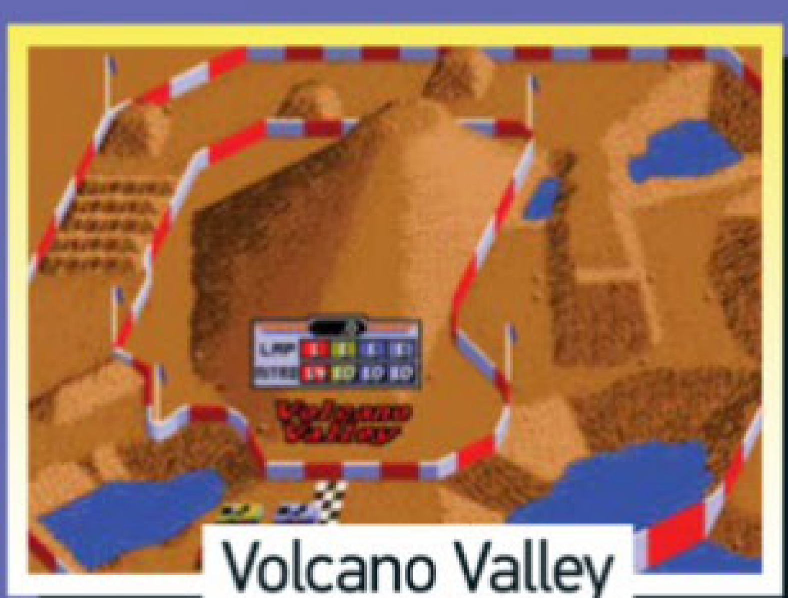
» [Master System] One of the four Master System version's bonus tracks.



For reasons unknown (most likely a lapsed licensing deal) the console versions did not include the 'Ironman' name. It would later re-appear in the 1993 SNES-only sequel, *Super Off Road: The Baja*, which was based around the endurance races which propelled Ivan's career. Besides dropping circuits in favour of long (read: boring) courses, a 3D behind-the-vehicle viewpoint was employed. The game was designed and coded by *Redline Racer*'s John Morgan but the final product bore no real relation to the original game and it was *Super Off Road* in name only.

In the arcades the closest thing Leland produced to a follow-up was *Indy Heat*, a circuit racer that shared the look and feel of *Super Off Road* and even had a sporting name attached in IndyCar star Danny Sullivan. Released in 1991, the game was later ported to various home computers and consoles. The true arcade successor to *Super Off Road* was *Off Road Challenge*, a 3D racer released in 1997 that once again used Stewart's name and likeness. It was fairly fun but hopelessly derivative, and the less said about the Nintendo 64 conversion the better.

The final game in the series is generally accepted to be 1998's *Off Road Thunder*, although it probably belongs better alongside Midway's other '*Thunder*' games like *Hydro Thunder* and *Arctic Thunder*. *Off Road Thunder* didn't receive a home release until 2005 when the *Midway Arcade Treasures 3* compilation arrived on consoles. The compilation featured seven other racing games including – thanks to the acquisition of Tradewest by the owner of the Midway label in 1994 – *Super Off Road*. It was the oldest game in the pack, yet it still managed to give the competition a rough ride. ✱



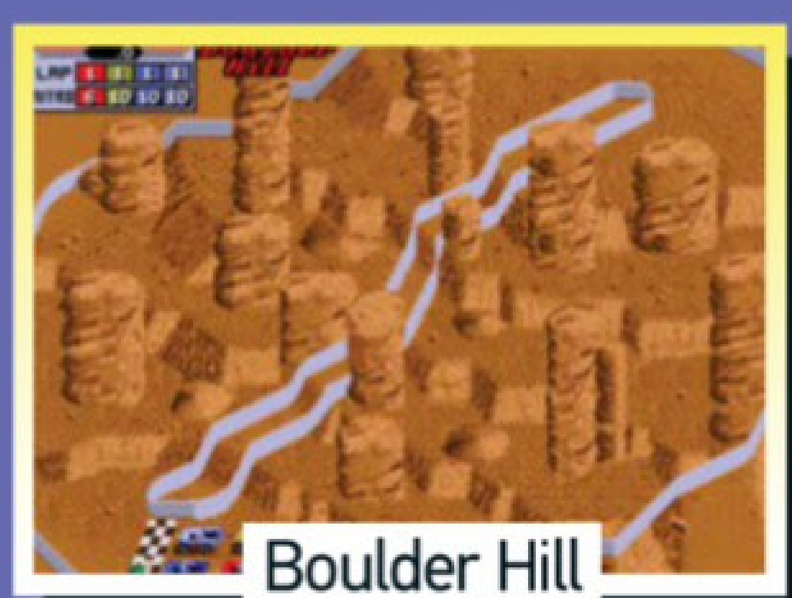
Volcano Valley



Pig Bog



Shortcut



Boulder Hill

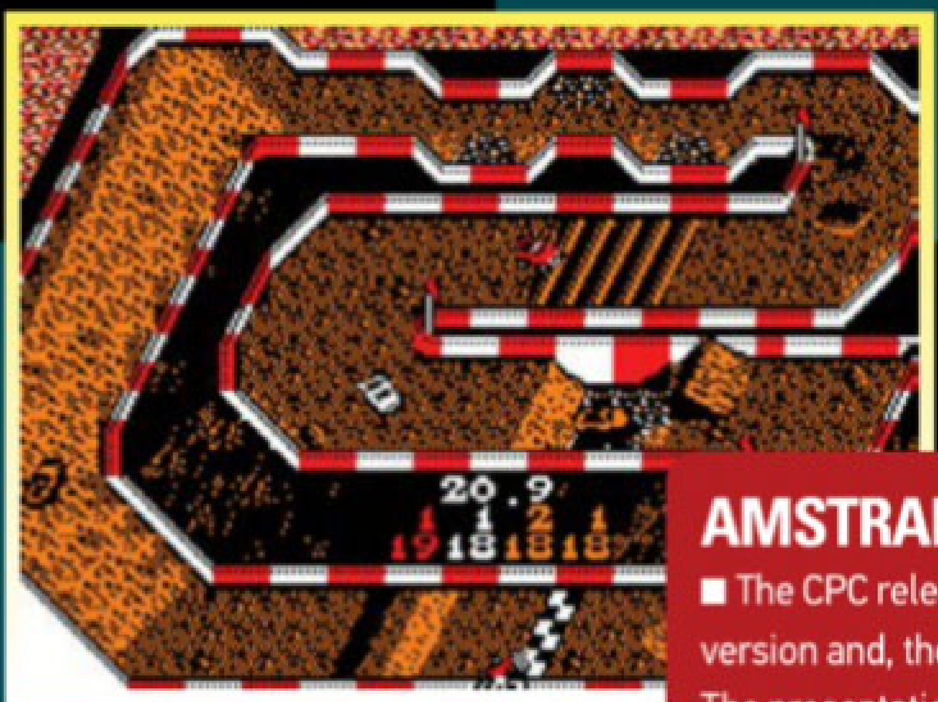
CONVERSION CAPERS

How the home versions stacked up against one another

ZX SPECTRUM

■ This version deserved praise for cramming the whole game and all eight tracks into a single 48K load. The graphics were detailed and some colour was evident, although the trucks were monochrome which could make things confusing. There was no three-player support either, but overall this was a fantastic conversion.





COMMODORE AMIGA

■ "Holy smokes," the Ironman would probably say if he saw this game in action. "This here Amiga version is darn near perfect!" Graftgold pulled out the stops and delivered a flawless conversion that was hard to distinguish from the original. If only all Amiga coin-op conversions had received such attention.



AMSTRAD CPC

■ The CPC release was similar to the Spectrum version and, therefore, highly recommended. The presentation was a step up, however, it did run slightly slower than the Speccy and the animation count was noticeably lower, affecting the playability a touch.



COMMODORE 64

■ The C64 game included support for three players unlike the Spectrum and CPC versions, which was a bit of a coup. Loads of colours were splashed about too so it looked closer to the original that its 8-bit rivals (although there was less detail on display). Most importantly the fun gameplay made the transition pretty much intact.

ATARI ST

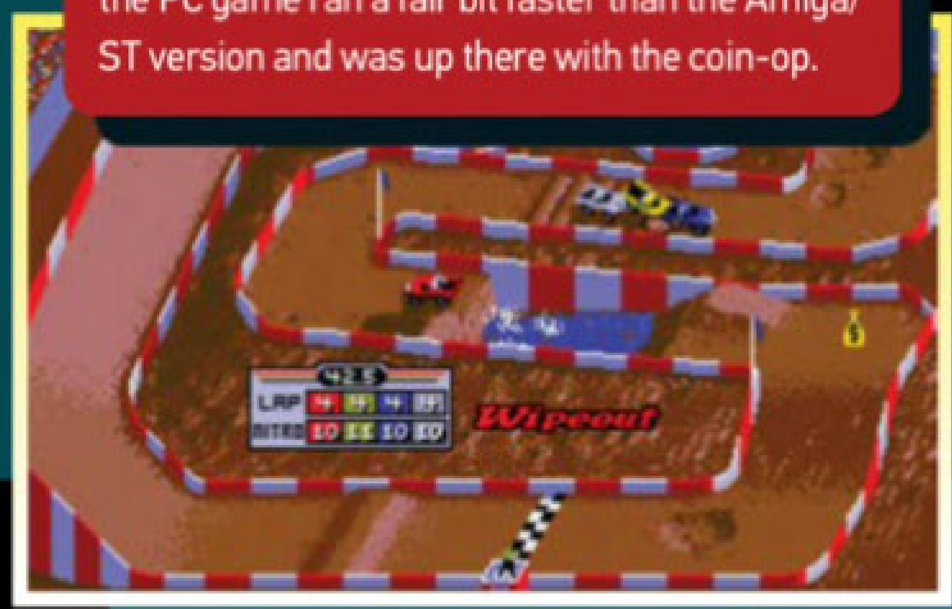
■ If the Ironman saw the ST release he'd probably say the same as he (probably) said about the Amiga version, before giving it a cheery thumbs up. The only difference was that the ST music was slightly inferior and the game came on two disks (as opposed to the Amiga's one), which meant some disk faffing was required.



PC/DOS

■ The PC version looked fine in the CGA and EGA modes but really came alive under VGA. As with the Amiga and ST releases you'd have a tough job telling it apart from the source. If anything, the PC game ran a fair bit faster than the Amiga/ST version and was up there with the coin-op.





ATARI LYNX

■ The Lynx was home to the most detailed portable version of the game yet, the animation and scrolling were a little choppy. The viewpoint was also slightly too 'zoomed in' which could make anticipating corners and hazards difficult.

SEGA GAME GEAR

■ This was hands down the best portable version. It was very similar to the superb Master System version except it lacked the extra tracks and the viewpoint scrolled (even if the packaging cheekily showed a full-screen shot). Sealing the deal was Gear-to-Gear support so that you could race against a buddy, providing you had an extra Game Gear.



SEGA MASTER SYSTEM

■ Of all the excellent 8-bit versions this was the leader of the pack. The soundtrack was a little ropey but the graphics and gameplay were top drawer. It even included four exclusive tracks – Redoubt, Dustbowl, Rattler and Rio Trio.





SNES

■ Very similar to the Mega Drive version, with the main difference being superior audio from the fantastic Follin brothers. This version also included some neat animations signalling the start and end of each race.



SEGA MEGA DRIVE

■ Against the likes of *F1* and *Virtua Racing*, *Super Off Road* was a clear case of gameplay over graphics on the Mega Drive. It did at least look as good as, if not better than the coin-op and featured the Track Pak upgrade. The extra eight courses improved the longevity of the game, particularly when playing solo.

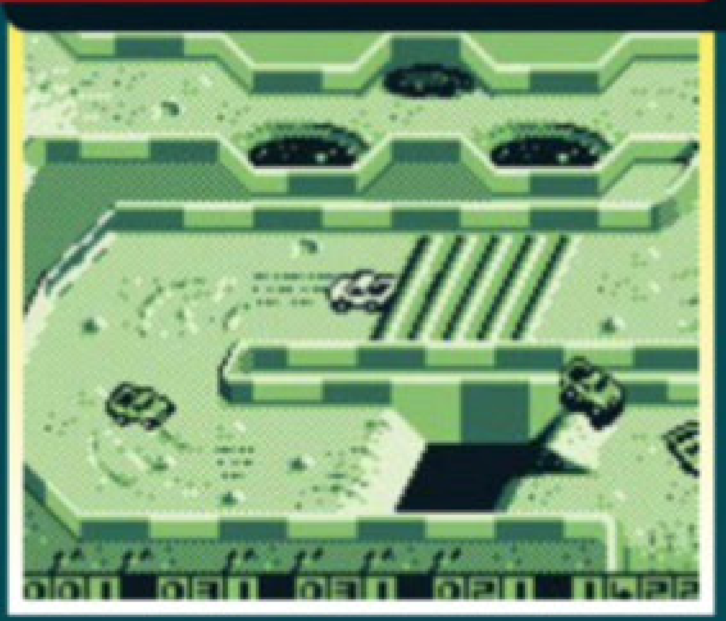


NES

■ This version went one better than the arcade by supporting four players – providing you had a NES Satellite or Four Score adaptor to hand. That aside the game suffered from slightly unresponsive controls that dragged it down a notch. One nice feature was that you were given unlimited continues for the first 15 races.

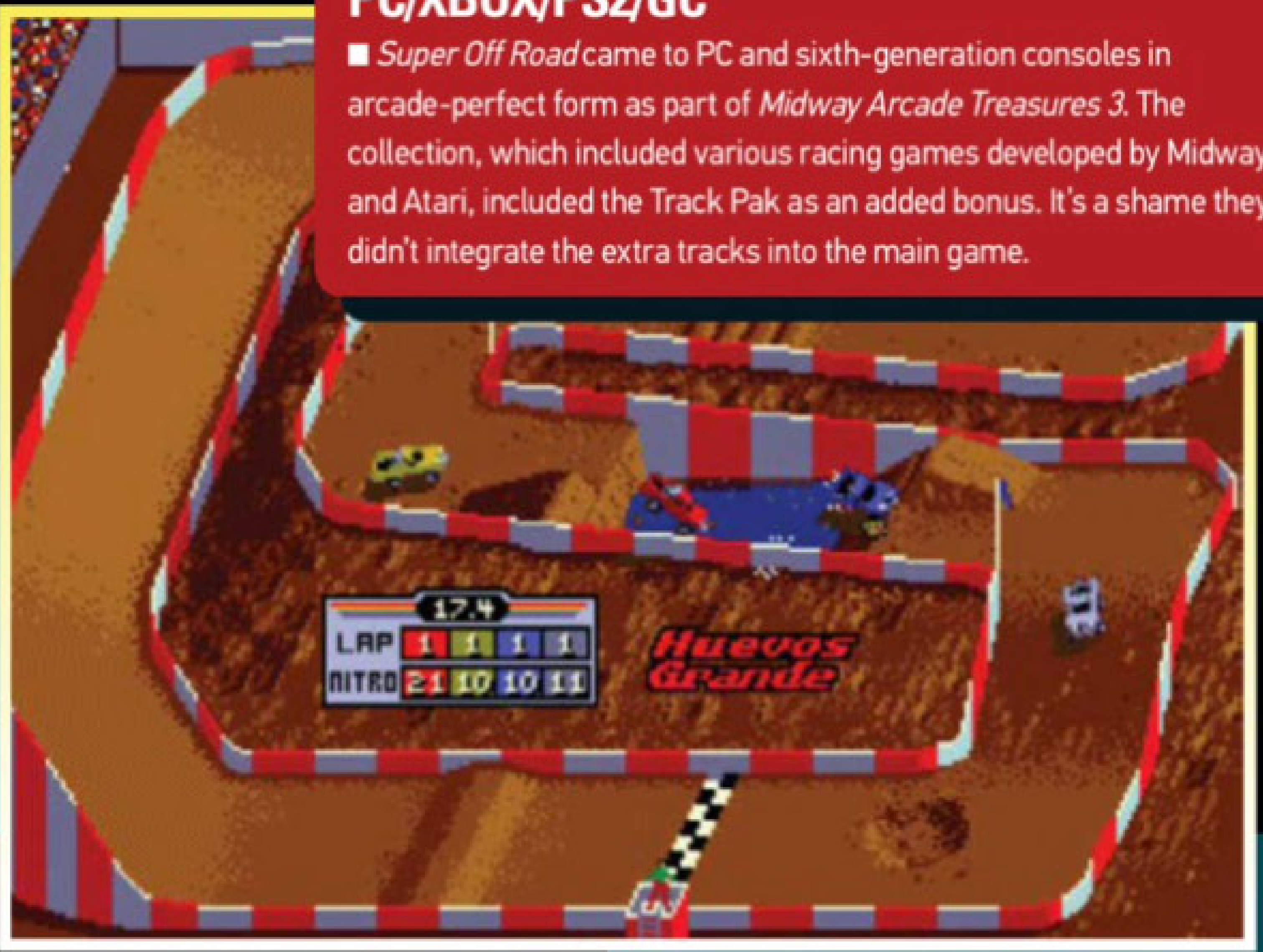
GAME BOY

■ The game wouldn't have worked very well on handheld screens so all portable versions featured a scrolling viewpoint. The downside was that you didn't always know where your rivals were. This version was missing one track but played pretty well. About as good as could be expected on the monochrome Game Boy.



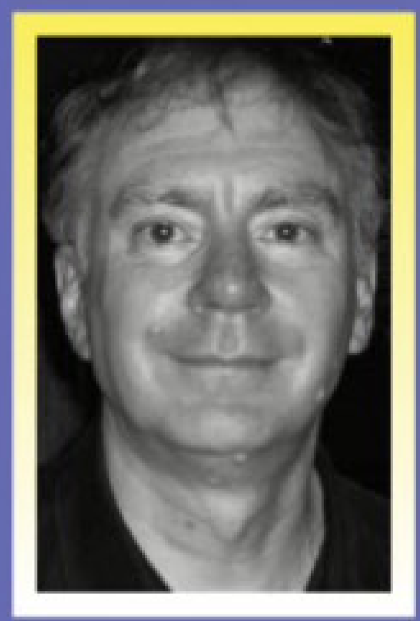
PC/XBOX/PS2/GC

■ *Super Off Road* came to PC and sixth-generation consoles in arcade-perfect form as part of *Midway Arcade Treasures 3*. The collection, which included various racing games developed by Midway and Atari, included the Track Pak as an added bonus. It's a shame they didn't integrate the extra tracks into the main game.



STEVE TURNER

We speak to the ex-Graftgold boss who helmed the Super Off Road conversions and coded the Z80 versions

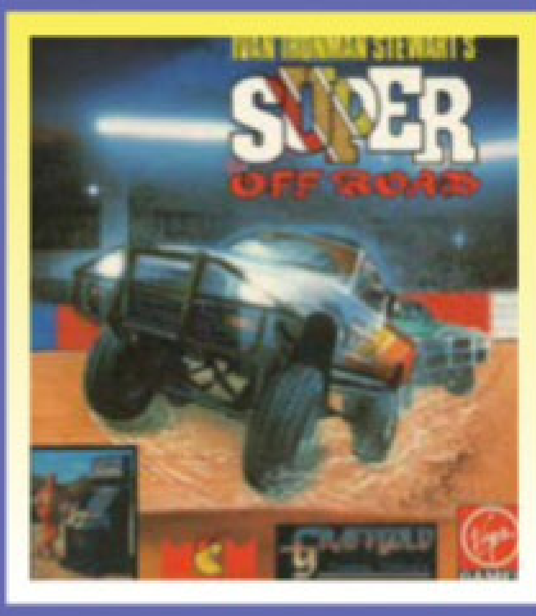


How did Graftgold secure the *Super Off Road* conversion job?

Virgin Games was impressed by Graftgold's conversions of *Flying Shark* and *Rainbow Islands* and offered us the chance to develop the home computer versions of the game. We preferred doing original stuff but conversions were important for Graftgold as they provided a regular income.

Did Virgin provide you with the coin-op for reference?

Yes. The thing was enormous and I had to have it delivered to my home so we could dismantle it in the garage. We then took all the parts to the office and reassembled it. We had great fun playing it, although it did have one design fault. When we got good at it and beat the AI trucks by a large margin we found the game just made the AI trucks drive faster in the next race. So it penalised you for being good at the game which was a bit negative.



The arcade game was coded in Z80. Did this make converting the game to the Z80 machines easier?

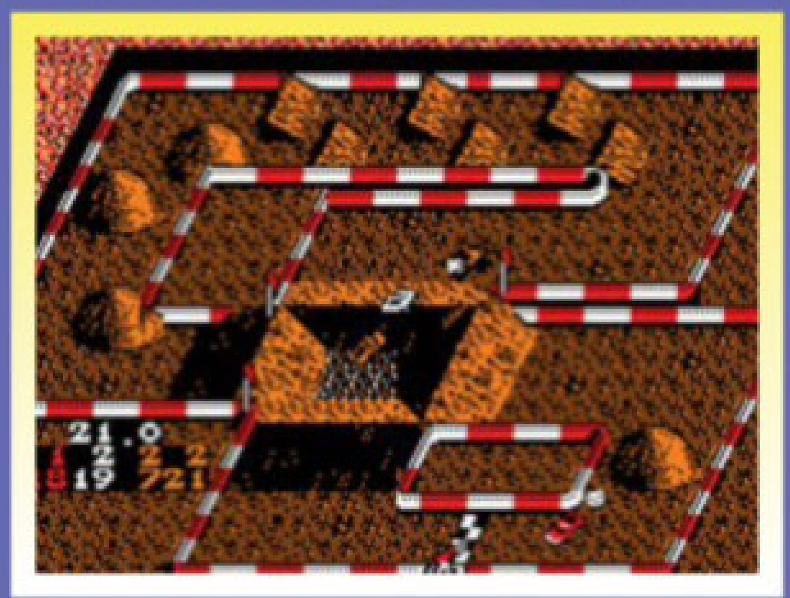
We were given a copy of the Z80 code and it gave us an idea of how the game worked but there wasn't much we could convert directly. The coin-op had multiple Z80s so the code didn't have to be too efficient – a lot of it was very long winded and messy, and we found some mistakes too. It did save us from working out how to encode the hilly terrain and we used the arcade graphics as a basis for the 16-bit games but we had to turn them into character maps for the 8-bit machines. The biggest problem was getting the game into the smaller 8-bit machines and making it look and play like the original. John Cummings had to work miracles to cut down the graphics so we could fit them in. Back in those days we often worked through the night when we were on a roll.

Which version do you think was the most successful?

My favourite version was the Amiga version. It was Gary Foreman's first Amiga game and he was determined to match the standard of Andrew Braybrook's *Rainbow Island* conversion. I think that it's one of the best arcade conversions ever made.

You ported the game to the Sega Master System and included four new tracks. Were you asked to enhance the game?

They wanted something extra over the Nintendo version so we invented some more tracks. The final version we did was the Game Gear version which used our Spectrum code and C64 graphics. We also added a game link feature and we gave the link code to Sega as some other developers were having trouble getting the link system working. My Spectrum code was also adapted for the Game Boy, but another developer had the contract so we didn't get any money for that version.





Minority Report

CLASSIC GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED



NEC PC-98

The Japan-exclusive PC-98 line dominated its native PC market for much of its 18-year lifespan. Rory Milne takes a look at some of the memorable titles from the thousands of games developed for the series…

TOTSUGEKI! MIX

■ DEVELOPER: C-LAB ■ YEAR: 1994

■ **COMPARED TO RIVAL** Japanese systems like the X68000 and FM Towns, the PC-98 was relatively underpowered, which left it ill-equipped to deliver the fast scrolling and smooth animation that was required for slick arcade quality titles. So instead the developers for NEC's hugely popular PC line had to be creative in their use of the available hardware and design to the strengths of the machines, which, after all, were designed primarily for business use.

One such developer, C-Lab, looked to 8-bit console gaming for ideas when it came to designing the 16-bit PC-98 action platformer *Totsugeki! Mix*, with the always reliable *Metroid* and *Castlevania* providing the Tokyo-based firm with its most obvious sources of inspiration.

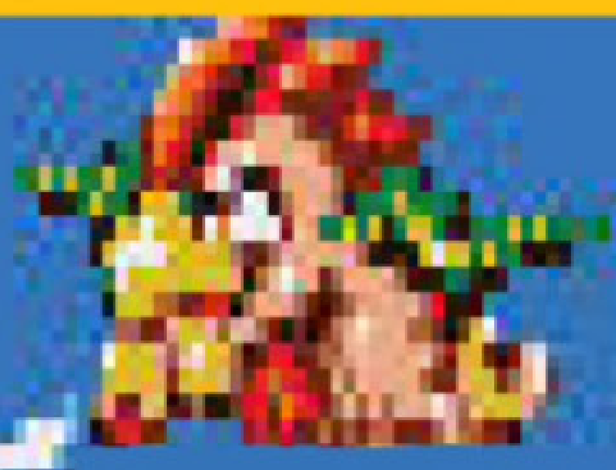
Totsugeki! Mix's lengthy preamble explains that three adventurers, each wielding their own unique weapon – a whip, a yo-yo and a magic blast, and demonstrating differing skill-sets such as extra-long jump, double-jump and greater damage – have been tasked with freeing the ten themed locations of a magical kingdom from the clutches of an enigmatic dark lord. Initially, only three of the kingdom's areas can be accessed, but a David's star is hidden in one of those three worlds, which when collected unlocks three more levels. These in turn contain a second hidden star that unlocks a further three stages, which is where a final hidden star has to be located in order to reach the game's ultimate location which the adventurers must traverse in order complete their quest.

Within this structured framework, the player's choice of protagonist to tackle each two-part level becomes quite important, given that some stages feature various minions that can take a lot of damage before they are dispatched, while henchmen in other areas are comparative lightweights whose agility allows them to evade short-range weaponry. So in general, an unsuitable character choice leads to cheap deaths.

Aside from the game's branching level setup, the mechanics in *Totsugeki! Mix* are where C-Lab have most allowed the pair of previously mentioned Famicom classics to inform its design approach. *Totsugeki! Mix* has the player making near-impossible leaps from platform to platform, climbing vertical scenery like flagpoles and beanstalks, and using moving objects for transport – all the while fending off seemingly cute



» [NEC PC-98] Near-impossible leaps from platform to platform and climbing vertical scenery is essential.



(but actually terrifying) minions with the player character's specialist weapon. And, of course, there are the game's power-ups, which are either found by smashing statues that rise from the ground or revealed after defeating certain opponents. Although, credit should be given to C-Lab for their title's more inventive character enhancements. Lastly, there are *Totsugeki! Mix*'s imaginative – and often bizarre – end of level bosses, which like those of its console muses provide impressive set-pieces and can prove challenging to defeat.

So, is it fair to describe *Totsugeki! Mix* as an example of Metroidvania? Well, not quite, given the game's differently skilled playable characters and unique power-ups – such as battle-ready fairy familiars. But that certainly doesn't mean that fans of the aforementioned sub-genre will be disappointed with what *Totsugeki! Mix* has to offer.



» [NEC PC-98] Imaginative bosses provide impressive set-pieces and prove challenging to defeat.



» [NEC PC-98] Ten themed locations of a magical kingdom must be freed from an enigmatic Dark Lord.



» [NEC PC-98] *Totsugeki! Mix*'s adventurers possess differing skills – this character double-jumps.

IN DEPTH



CUTE BUT SINISTER FOES

■ Like the Mushroom Kingdom or Fantasy Zone, *Totsugeki! Mix*'s world is cute, but the game's minions and bosses exhibit a sinister vibe despite their cartoon-like appearance.

MULTIPLE PERSONALITIES

■ The three protagonists in *Totsugeki! Mix* are easily identified by their hair colours, also, their attacks all have differing ranges and inflict varying damage.

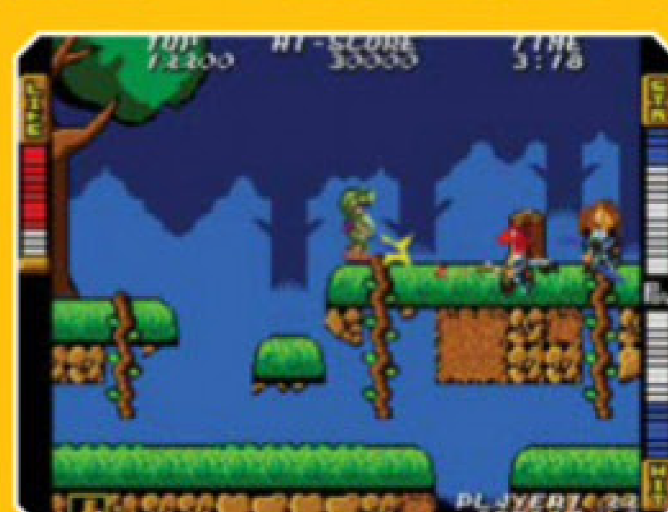
PERPLEXING POWER-UPS

■ Although *Totsugeki! Mix* has a simple power-up mechanic where you smash statues and collect their contents, the game also randomly rewards you for killing minions.

METROIDVANIA MUCH?

■ Levels revealed as you progress, platforming mixed with weapon-based combat – yes, the *Totsugeki! Mix* owes a large debt to the likes of *Metroid* and *Castlevania*.

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



ATHENA

ARCADE

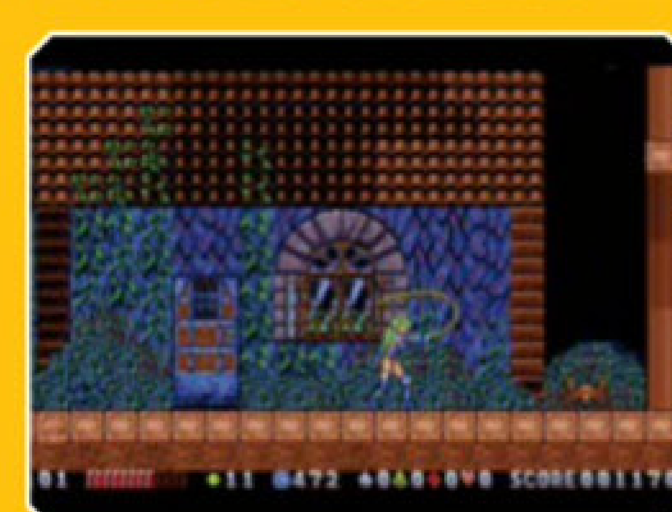
■ Although it lacks branching levels and selectable player characters, the cute and colourful *Athena* shares a lot in common with *Totsugeki! Mix*. You get a feisty female protagonist, more scrolling platforming than you can shake a clutch of collectible weaponry at and a wealth of inspired, if not crazy, bosses.



MASTER OF DARKNESS

MASTER SYSTEM

■ As *Master Of Darkness* takes its cue from *Castlevania* it's probably no surprise to hear that the gothic platformer shares gameplay elements and mechanics with *Totsugeki! Mix*. The Master System romp's confined, dusk-set Victorian London stages strike a darker, more claustrophobic tone, however.



RUSTY

PC-98

■ Before developing *Totsugeki! Mix*, C-Lab produced *Rusty* – a fantasy-themed epic featuring a whip-bearing heroine. *Rusty*'s graphic engine was seemingly reused for *Totsugeki! Mix*, but fantastical screen-sized bosses allow C-Lab's earlier platformer to stand out from its successor.

Minority Report

GARYUOH HIDENSHO

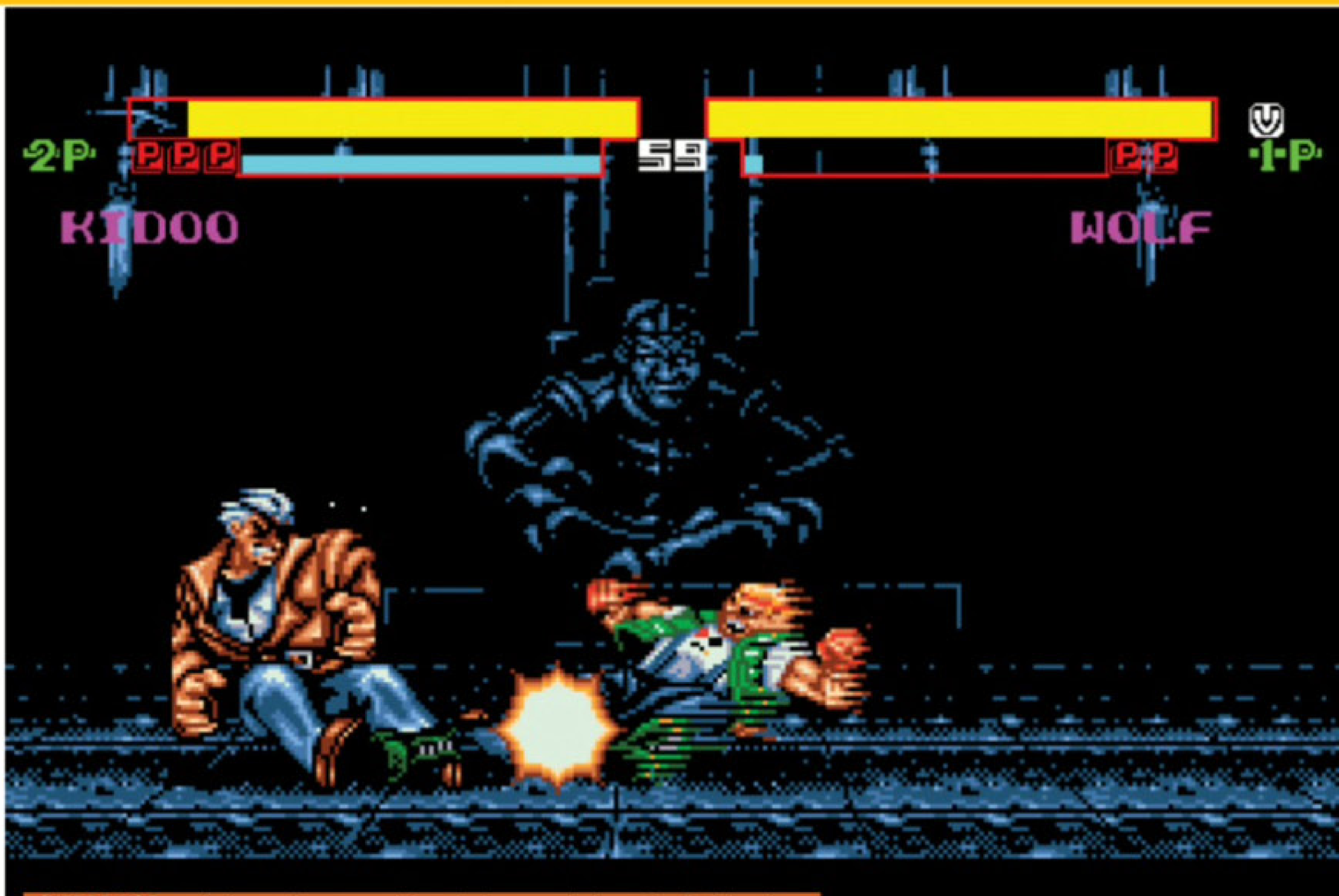
■ DEVELOPER: SOFTEC ■ YEAR: 1994

■ **Clearly influenced by the likes of *Street Fighter II*, though featuring a notably smaller character pool, and lacking animated backgrounds, *Garyuoh Hidensho* delivers large, well-defined fighters that move around the screen at pace.** Crucially, for a beat-'em-up, these sizable sprite warriors are highly responsive and smoothly animated, which is impressive given the rather limited potential of the host hardware.

Garyuoh Hidensho's brief backstory – a seemingly obligatory requirement of brawlers prevalent in the Nineties – is that your chosen fighter has to battle their way through the game's roster of eclectic characters in order to claim a scroll from each defeated combatant. Success in doing so reveals the title's boss who must be bested in an epic final showdown.

In keeping with the *Street Fighter II* template, each fight is decided on a best of three rounds basis with the choice of opposition decided by the player between bouts. Aside from standard punch, kick and jump combinations, *Garyuoh Hidensho* features health bar depleting assaults unique to each fighter ranging from pyrotechnic projectiles to acrobatic special moves.

On this point, if there's one negative aspect to *Garyuoh Hidensho* it's that certain AI opponents can be impossible to beat with standard attacks but slightly too easily overcome with special moves. But this is a minor complaint given the game's many plus points and obviously isn't an issue in two-player mode.



» [NEC PC-98] Once all other combatants are defeated, a boss must be bested in a final showdown.



» [NEC PC-98] *Garyuoh Hidensho* delivers large, well-defined fighters that move around the screen at pace.



» [NEC PC-98] Health bar-depleting moves (unique to each fighter) include pyrotechnic and acrobatic assaults.

MORE GAMES TO PLAY



» RUNNERS HIGH

■ DEVELOPER: COMPILE
■ YEAR: 1996

■ **Riffing on Sega** with its bright colours and high-energy soundtrack, Compile's racer also references *Space Harrier*'s rocket-powered protagonist and *Out Run*'s next stage countdown mechanic. Aside from ramps in its ocean course, *Runners High* is a solo ground level race against the clock. Once mastered, the game's courses do lose appeal, but before that happens, *Runners High* delivers a short but very sweet ride.



» GALT RIO

■ DEVELOPER: GGG SOFT
■ YEAR: 1995

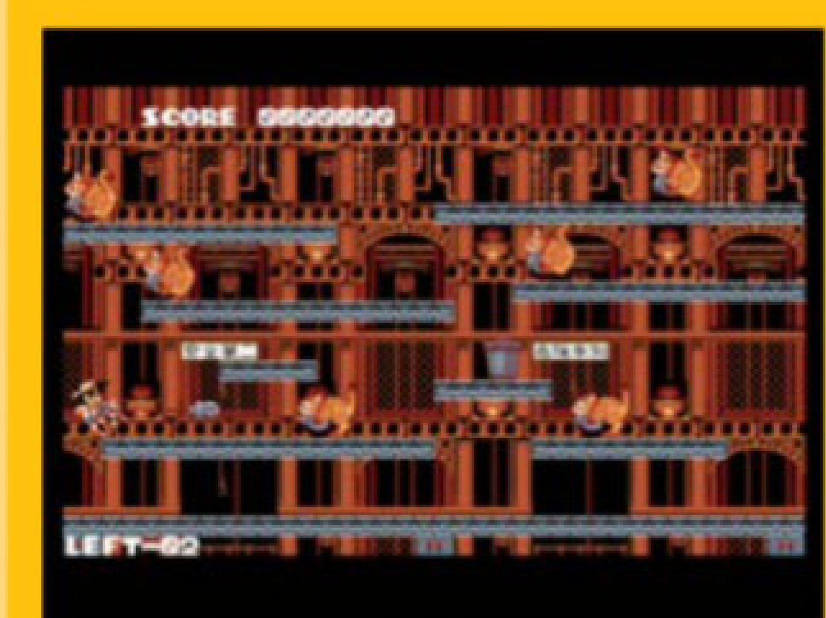
■ **While this game** owes its weapon system to *Gradius*, in terms of scope and ambition *Galt Rio* shares more with Irem's *R-Type*. Visually stunning in places, GGG Soft's shmup reinvents its look from stage to stage with constant backdrop changes and fresh cannon fodder in creatively rendered sprite form. *Galt Rio* alternates between filling the screen with bullets and full-screen bosses, never giving the player a breather.



» MARPLE MAGIC

■ DEVELOPER: FUGA SYSTEMS
■ YEAR: 1992

■ **If you look** beyond *Marple Magic*'s simple gameplay, you find a difficult and highly addictive puzzler. It challenges your slimy blob character to bookend rows of gold blocks with pairs of plain coloured blocks, which you slide around the playfield. Same coloured blocks explode if one slides into another, though, so care and concentration are essential. Once each colourful conundrum is solved, it's onto a tougher one.



» KNUCKLE KID

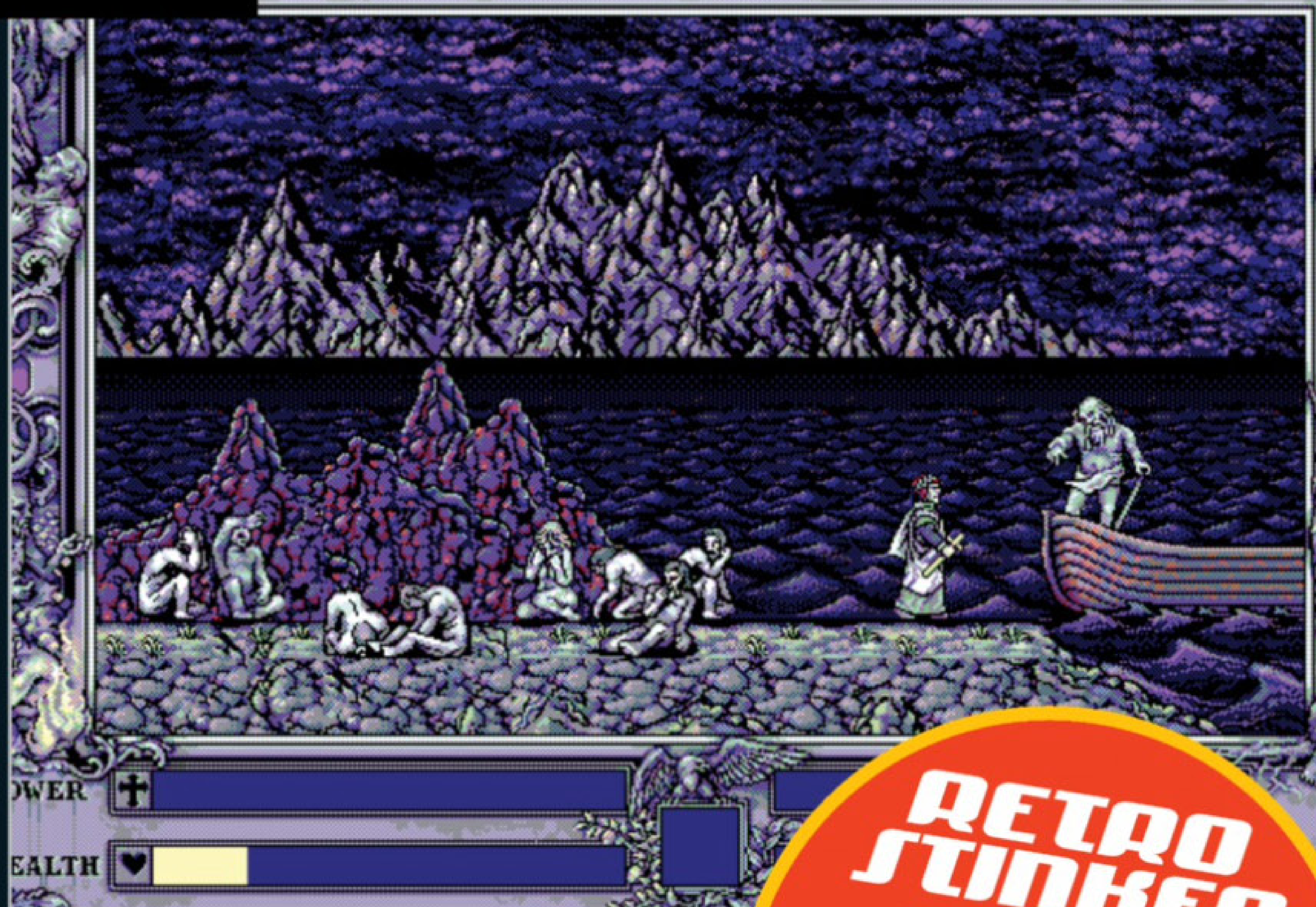
■ DEVELOPER: COMPILE
■ YEAR: 1995

■ **What's the best** way to defeat an army of robotic animals? Well, become part machine yourself. Following this reasoning, *Knuckle Kid*'s hero has an extending punching arm. The game's fun premise of battering creatures is expanded upon by the inclusion of a billiards mechanic where biffed animals can be bounced around taking out their brethren. This is further complimented by the game's gigantic boss fights.

TAMASHII NO MON

■ DEVELOPER: KOEI ■ YEAR: 1994

» [NEC PC-98] Koei's RPG heritage is reflected in Dante's regular interactions with the denizens of hell.



■ ADAPTED FROM DANTE'S *Divine Comedy* – an account of Dante Alighieri's journey through the nine circles of hell – *Tamashii No Mon* is best described as a side-scrolling adventure with platforming and beat-'em-up elements.

Aesthetically, the game boasts detailed pixel art and an accomplished soundtrack, and gameplay-wise, blurs traditional genre boundaries. During the mid-Nineties, Koei was better known for developing RPGs than action titles, and this heritage is reflected in Dante's regular interactions with the denizens of hell and the poet Virgil. These encounters often help forward the story or explain your next objective. In terms of the title's arcade components, light platforming is a constant requirement as are scuffles with hellbound minions and health bar based duels to the death with demonic bosses. Since Dante's only form of defence – a crucifix – acts as a melee weapon, it's only able to deliver damage at close quarters. This proves awkward, as the creatures that he encounters tend to attack from distance.

In theory, *Tamashii No Mon*'s disparate gameplay components shouldn't fit together, but Koei's game does somehow feel cohesive and, more importantly, plays really well.



» [NEC PC-98] Hellish creatures use open space to swiftly attack from distance then retreat as quickly.

RETRO STINKER

» MELPOOL LAND

■ DEVELOPER: COMPILE ■ YEAR: 1995

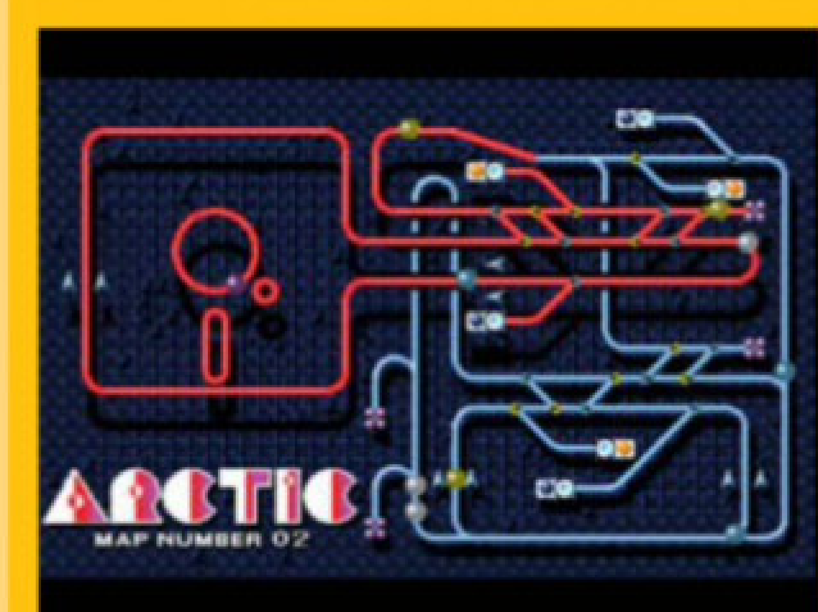
■ First the positives: great graphics, catchy tunes and a solid concept, but this cute Sumo-esque brawler lacks gameplay. Fighters have only one attack and you simply hammer it to win.



» SOLID LANCER

■ DEVELOPER: SYSTEM SOFT
■ YEAR: 1993

■ Given the hardware differential between the coin-op *Starblade* and a 1993 model PC-98, it's incredible that System Soft coaxed a tribute to Namco's polygon shooter onto NEC's PC range. Unlike *Starblade*, *Solid Lancer* demands more than crosshair positioning and constant firing to take down targets. In fact, prioritising threats is vital to survival as the game offers few shield or weapon refills during its various missions.



» ARCTIC – ACTIVE RAIL PLAYING

■ DEVELOPER: ARTDINK
■ YEAR: 1988

■ The subtitle in *Arctic* refers to the key mechanic where two sets of railroad switches are used to guide coloured balls around tracks with the aim of delivering them to terminals of the matching colour. This sounds easy on paper, but since other balls are in play and terminals are only accessible from one direction, completing each stage is anything but.



» RUDE BREAKER

■ DEVELOPER: COMPILE
■ YEAR: 1996

■ Fans of Compile's *Aleste* series will find themselves on familiar ground with *Rude Breaker*. Visually, the game boasts some detailed sprite work and nice touches such as a parallax star field. In terms of gameplay, *Rude Breaker* delivers everything that *Compile* shooters are renowned for. You face firefights, trigger-happy bosses and screen-sized opposition. Your rewards are destructive weaponry and power-ups.



» ELM KNIGHT

■ DEVELOPER: MICRO CABIN
■ YEAR: 1992

■ A first-person perspective title with detailed sprite-scaling that scrolls at speed in multiple directions might seem a big ask for the underpowered PC-98, but that's exactly what Micro Cabin delivered with *Elm Knight*. The game has you battling as a Mech against enemy counterparts in melee brawls and long-range armed combat. *Elm Knight* plays out in naturally occurring maze-like battlefields such as forests and rocky deserts.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come



- **» Featured System:** PC
- **» Year:** 2012
- **» Publisher:** Telltale Games
- **» Developer:** Telltale Games
- **» Key People:** Sean Vanaman (Co-project Lead), Jake Rodkin (co-project Lead), Sean Ainsworth (director and cinematic artist), Derek Sakai (art director)

GO DEEPER

» Telltale used feedback from each episode as a way to improve the experience for players.

» Art director Derek Sakai based the design of Clementine on his daughter.



» [PC] The choice system also covers other decisions involving survival tactics as well as dialogue options.

49. THE WALKING DEAD: SEASON ONE

Facing tough decisions around every corner and smashing a zombie here and there, James Churchill braves Telltale's videogame vision of the popular franchise

THE BACKGROUND

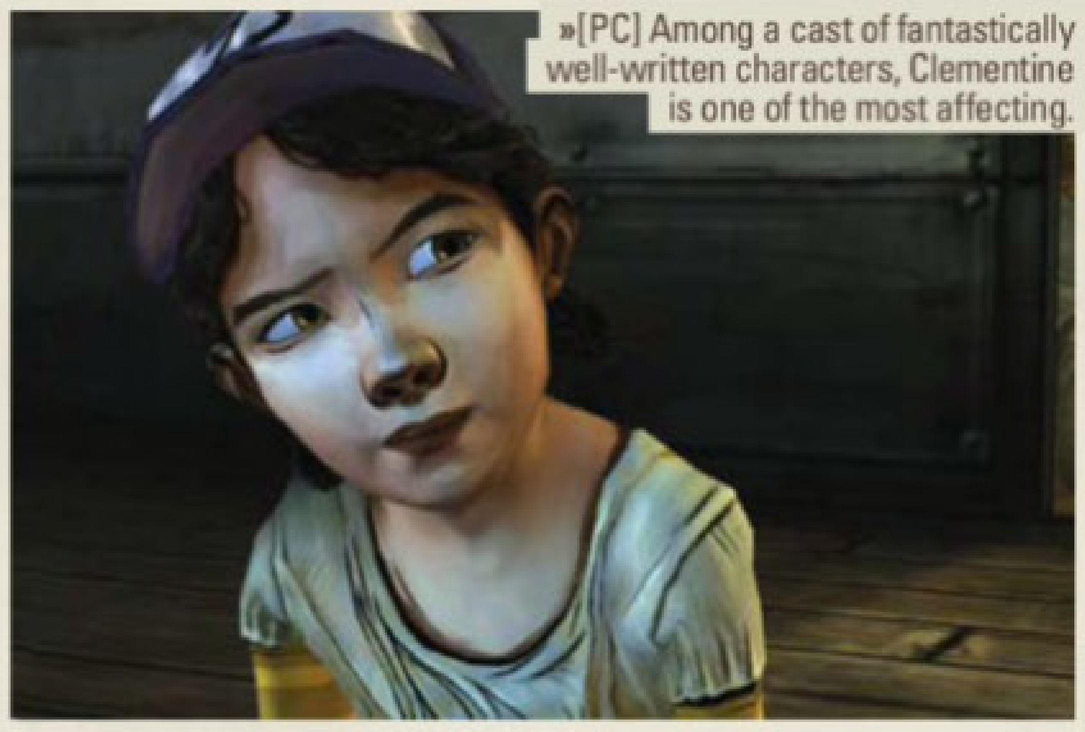
Telltale was no stranger to narrative gaming before creating *The Walking Dead*. Not only had the company been founded by ex-LucasArts employees, but it followed up by releasing several episodic story lead adventure games via digital distribution services during the late Noughties, with most of its back catalogue being adaptations of popular licences. Although some of its games received mixed or negative responses, Telltale found great success with *Tales Of Monkey Island*, the *Sam & Max* series, and *Strong Bad's Cool Game For Attractive People*. It was the latter that caught the attention of Robert Kirkman, the writer of the acclaimed *The Walking Dead* comic book series.

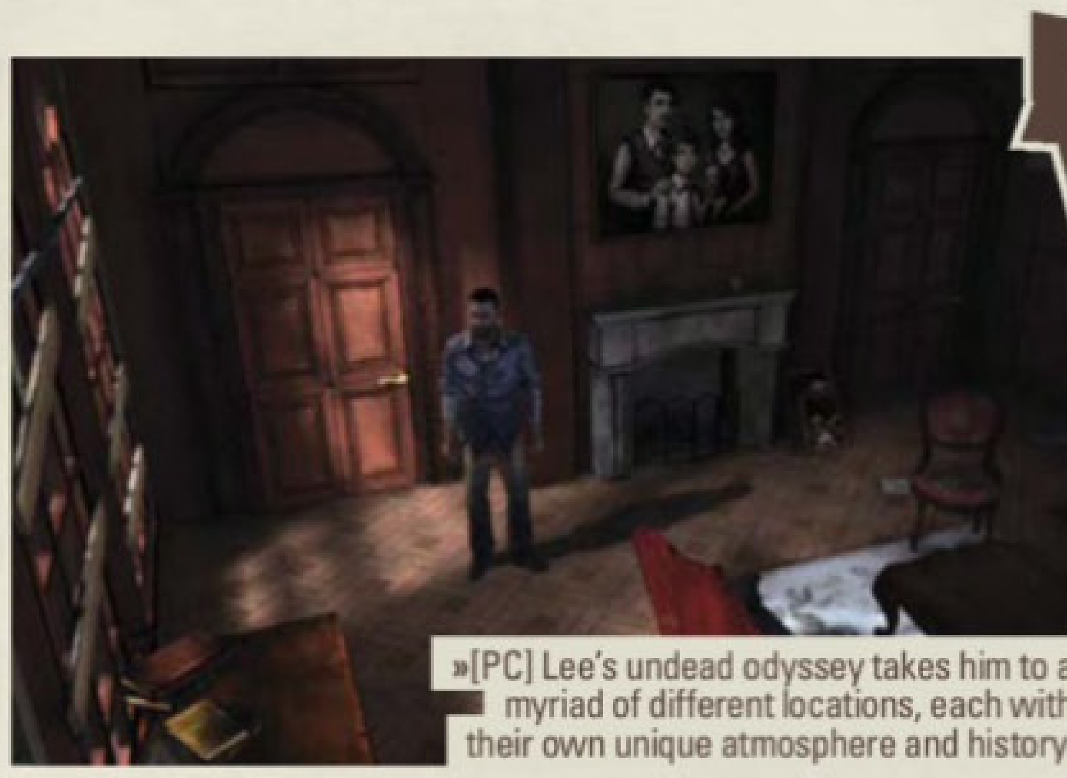
After arranging a deal with Warner Bros. to turn *The Walking Dead* into a game, Telltale presented a proposal to Kirkman, who liked the focus on narrative and player choice as a means of survival. But rather than develop a direct adaptation, Telltale created its own storylines and characters within the universe of the comic, one which focused on the breakdown of human morality in a devastatingly bleak and violent vision of the USA's southern states during a zombie apocalypse. Telltale's game did not disappoint.

THE GAME

You are placed in the shoes of former college professor Lee Everett as the zombie outbreak begins outside Atlanta, Georgia, starting off your journey in the back of a police car. The game soon throws you into the fray, piling on the pressure with endless twists, turns and fatal situations as the shit hits more than just the fan.

Lee's story is split into five episodes, each one forcing you to make dozens of decisions which impact the story and characters around you. This is blended with quick time events, instances of free exploration and occasional puzzle solving in the more traditional fashion of point-and-click games. These aspects blend together seamlessly,


»[PC] Among a cast of fantastically well-written characters, Clementine is one of the most affecting.


»[PC] Lee's undead odyssey takes him to a myriad of different locations, each with their own unique atmosphere and history.

meaning you'll need to keep on your toes when dealing with the undead or even worse, other humans.

And that's where things become interesting. Although *The Walking Dead* takes place in the heart of a zombie outbreak, it instead serves as a backdrop, giving way to the real drama that occurs between people when society's laws have broken down. Danger can come from within and outside your group, and you never fully know what anyone is capable of until it's too late. The judgement calls you are forced to make will be remembered, with other survivors often bringing them back to haunt you later on. But every scenario feels important, whether it's how you talk to a grieving survivor, whose side you take in an argument, or morally impossible choices concerning people's mortality. And the outcomes are often egregiously dark.

To add a sense of realism your options are not split into rigid positive or negative outcomes. There is usually no higher moral ground to take, only the choice that you feel will do the least damage to the characters you care about, and even then it's uncertain how your choices will affect yourself and others down the line because the story normally continues regardless of how dire the consequences of your actions are. You are forced to live with the guilt and regret of your decisions.

Whilst this endless torrent of moral dilemmas is hard enough on the adults, the lives of children are also at stake. One of the most important encounters in the game is with Clementine, an eight-year-old girl Lee meets in the first episode. This relationship becomes a huge anchor for the game, adding another layer of morality to your choices. It's not just her life that's in the balance, but a child's innocence and emotional state in a world thrown into complete turmoil.

Each episode is written with a particular narrative focus whilst brilliantly feeding into an overarching plot, complete with unpredictable pacing. A slow contemplative moment could easily be derailed by disaster at a second's notice. And whilst there are moments of humour, happiness and triumph, there is always the dark lurking feeling that it won't last long.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Aside from achieving massive critical and commercial success, *The Walking Dead: Season One* was a revolutionary step in storytelling, doing away with obvious moral choices which we have seen time and time again, and opting for horribly bleak and ambiguous conundrums which helped deliver an emotionally mature experience that few games have matched since. Add in the fact that it's a brilliant adaptation which remains faithful to the harrowing spirit of the original comic, features well-rounded and interesting characters and trumps most narrative efforts by larger developers, then the case only builds for the importance and greatness of *The Walking Dead: Season One*. On the off chance that you may have missed Telltale's masterpiece, the best thing to do is to jump into it blind. On doing so you will feel the undeniably gripping effect this gritty diamond of a game possesses. *

Things of note

MINORITY REPORT

At the end of each episode you see how your major choices compare with other players across the world. Are you in the minority when it comes to morality?



LAST ACTION HERO

The game drops the occasional action sequences (involving zombies) which are laced into the multiple play styles, usually requiring you to test your marksmanship skills.



NEED A HINT?

The hint system guides players towards the next objective. However, switching it off entirely provides a much more engrossing and engaging experience.



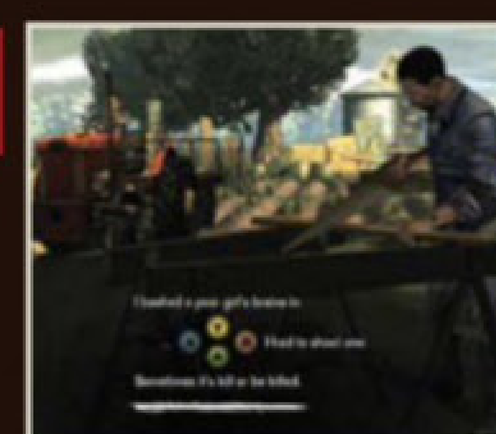
WELCOME BACK

Every new episode gives you a recap of previous events in the style of an American drama series, complete with the voice-over: "Last time on *The Walking Dead*…"



THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

Many decisions give you a limited time to react, delivering a realistic feeling of the pressure and stress that Lee faces.





»[PC] Choosing sides within a group of survivors provides some wonderfully tense moments.



»[PC] Keeping quiet is also an option in many situations. There's only one way to find out if it's a path worth taking.


»[PC] Although the game primarily features new characters, a few from the comic series also make an appearance.



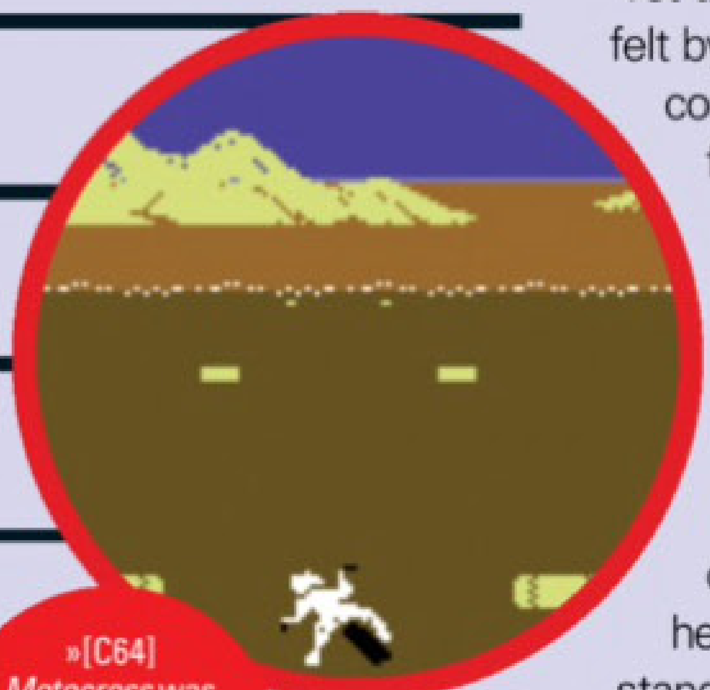


It built its reputation on martial arts and for close to 33 years it has battled to defend its position as Britain's most successful independent publisher. David Crookes talks to System 3 founder Mark Cale

It was the eighth PCW Show but it was the first time that any publisher had found itself banned. Then again, it was probably the first time that a gaming company had turned up to an event with no finished games, a group of karateka hell bent on wrapping poles around each others' Adam's apples and a bevy of scantily-clad women wielding whips and chains.

Yet this was symptomatic of the desperation felt by System 3 in 1985. The developer it had commissioned to create *International Karate* had fallen short of its task, and upon seeing the code, Mark Cale had let out an almighty sigh, but decided the show had to go on. "We decided the best thing to do was to create some controversy," Mark remembers.

The karateka masked the lack of a game perfectly as they went about chopping blocks of wood with their bare hands on the sizeable hexagonal stage in the middle of System 3's stand. The women, meanwhile, were there to promote a game called *Twister* which, in order to make their risqué set of moves actually relevant, had been renamed *Twister: Mother Of Harlot*.



»[C64] *Motocross* was one of a number of games imported for European markets by System 3.

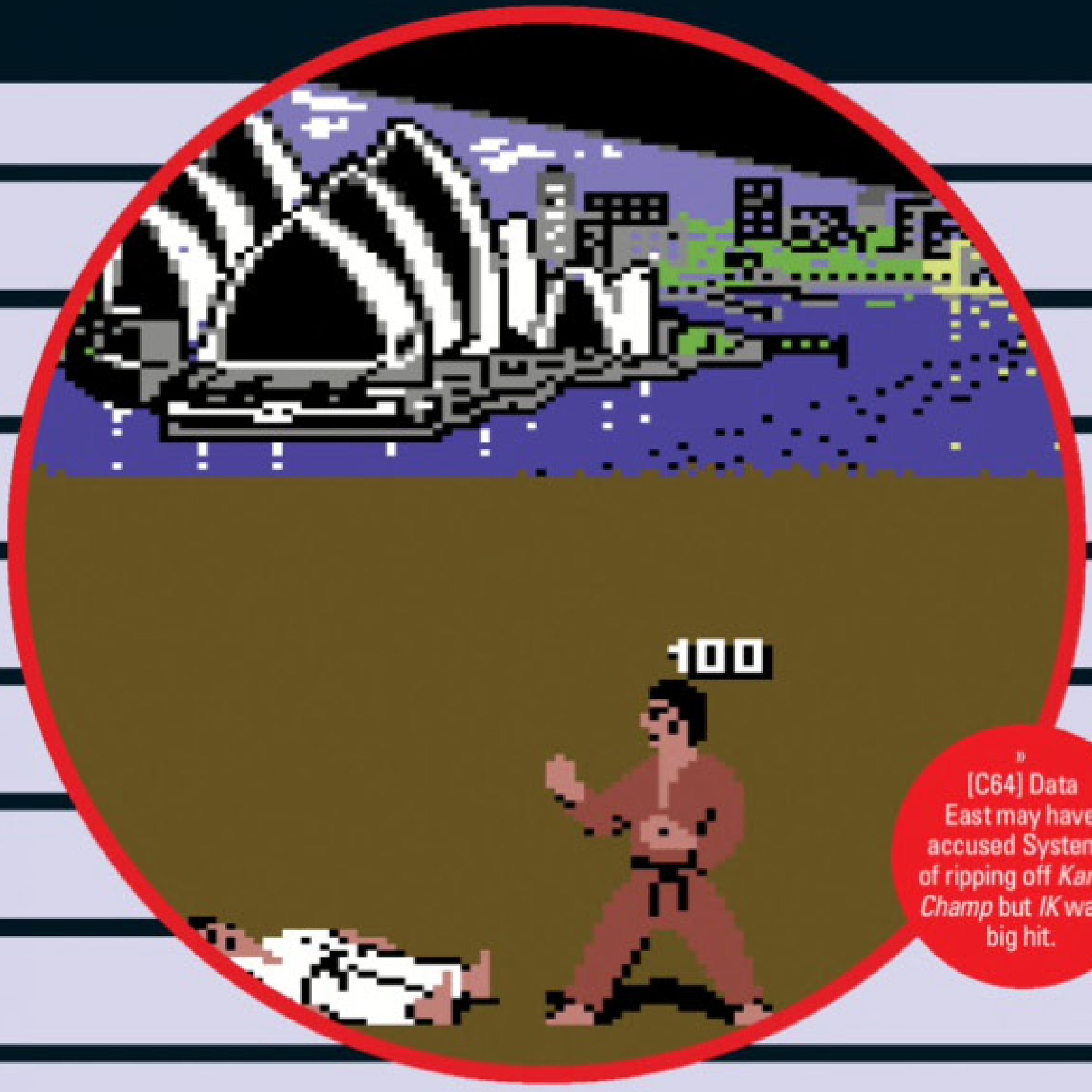
It wasn't long before the PCW Show organisers were threatening to turn off the power to the stand. "We knew that the organisers were a Christian group and very proper in their ways," says Mark, who held out long enough for the press photographers to snap away, guaranteeing coverage in the tabloids the following day. "I would not do it in my age now," he adds. "But when you're young, you're ambitious with your ideas and you want things to stand out."

Mark co-founded System 3 in 1982. He had been working as the second assistant to the celebrated English portrait and fashion photographer, Norman Parkinson, who "spent half his time in the Caribbean and half his time over here photographing Royals," according to Mark. Although he learned as much as he could about the cameras and lighting, Mark felt a long, photographic career wasn't for him. "I realised very quickly that I wasn't going to make a lot of money in the photographic world," he says. "So I started to look around for ideas."

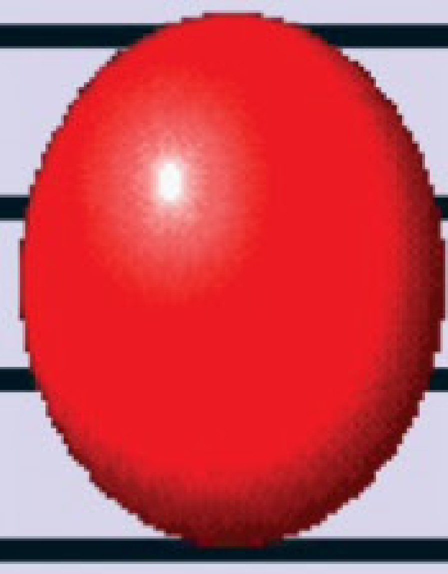
One of Mark's jobs was to take photos for Atari UK in London. "While I was there I was always moaning about their games on the VCS not being good enough," he laughs. Jon Norledge, the company's software development manager, suggested Mark set up his own publisher as the best way of ensuring that games would meet with his approval. Mark did just that, roping in his friend, Emerson Best, and a computer studies college student, Michael Koo. "His course was called System Studies," says Mark. "And because there were three of us in the company, we felt we had the perfect name."

Michael dropped out early into the venture, leaving Mark and Emerson to create their first, saleable game – a shoot-'em-up called *Colony 7*. Released for the Atari 400, 800 and XL, and based on Taito's 1981 arcade shooter, the game was described as having "fast, furious 3D action" in which players would defend their colony's food stocks from space pirates. "It did well – or at least well enough to encourage us to make another game," says Mark, whose bedroom was being used as System 3's HQ. And so in 1983 *Lazer Cycle*

SYST



» [C64] Data East may have accused System 3 of ripping off *Karate Champ* but *IK* was a big hit.



was released for the BBC Micro, followed in 1984 by a *Star Wars* game, *titled Deathstar Interceptor.*

With 12 screens packed with 3D graphics and smooth animation, *Deathstar Interceptor* was released for the Commodore 64. While the Spectrum version was arguably better (it included speech), the game marked the start of a special relationship between System 3 and the American manufacturer. Commodore's machines would go on to underpin much of System 3's early success, so much so that when Mark flew to the USA hoping to license *Deathstar Interceptor*, he eagerly snapped up three C64 products owned by Tronix to import into the UK: *Suicide Strike*, *Juice* and *Motocross*.

"We were the first publisher to license and bring games from the US to Europe but those three weren't the only games we were offered," Mark says. "There was one called *Kid Grid* which we turned down for some reason." Mark also met other big US publishers including Epyx and Electronic Arts. "We were talking to Bing Gordon and Trip Hawkins at EA with a view to doing a deal but it didn't happen," Mark continued.

Still, the talks were not without merit. "The most important thing was that we built an alliance with Activision," says Mark. "The publisher was just setting up in the UK and it was going to be launching *Ghostbusters*. It was looking at other products to link the new UK venture in and so we were assigned to deal with a guy called Rod Cousens who was running Quicksilva at the time and who was about to set up Electric Dreams. We dearly wanted to impress Activision." *International Karate*, which was inspired by Emerson's adoration of Taekwondo (a love that had even seen him fight for the UK team), was seen as the killer game to do this.

System 3 commissioned LT Software to work on the title but it soon ran into problems. The Spectrum version was poor and the C64 version incomplete. Worse, the game's programmer disappeared shortly ▶

> **"We were the first publisher to license and bring games from the US to Europe"**
> MARK CALE GOES STATESIDE

IN THE KNOW

- System 3's company mission statement is "perfection is the only accepted standard".
- *International Karate* was not only a popular big seller, it walked away with a deserved Showcase award for technical achievement at the CES in Chicago.
- System 3's deal with the American giant, Activision, allowed the latter to become the first truly international publisher.
- CEO Mark Cale was inspired to commission *The Last Ninja* because he was a fan of *Adventure* on the Atari 2600.
- System 3 had close ties with Commodore. *The Last Ninja* was the computer's most successful original game. Titles would also appear in Amiga packs.
- System 3 prefers to use freelance developers, although it did once have as many as 100 staff at one point.
- *The Last Ninja 3* was the only game to be awarded a coveted 100% score in *Commodore User* magazine.
- *Myth: A History in the Making* was licensed to Mindscape in the US and was rebranded under the popular franchise of *Conan*.
- System 3 released more games for the PlayStation 2 than for any other platform it worked on via its new label Play It.
- The first game to use Sony's peer-to-peer technology was System 3's *Gottlieb Pinball Classics*, released in 2006.
- Male Cale adores Ferrari sport cars. In 2008, the company produced *Ferrari Challenge*.

EM 3





TIMELINE

1982 System 3 is created by Mark Cale, Emerson Best and Michael Koo. *Colony 7* marked the company's first release.

1984 The company wanted to license its games in America but it spotted an opportunity to import games to the UK.

1985 Following System 3's licensing desires, the imports *Suicide Strike*, *Juice!* and *Motocross*, are released.

1985 System 3 makes a controversial appearance at the PCW Show which results in much publicity and a deal with Activision although Epyx snaps up International Karate.

1986 *International Karate +* is launched. The game is as an update to *IK*, featuring multiple karateka.

1987 *The Last Ninja* sells 7.5 million units on the C64. These sales inspired the development of a string of sequels.

1988 *The Last Ninja 2* is released to even greater acclaim with 13.5 million copies sold, almost doubling the original game's sales.

1989 System 3 releases the games, *Myth: History In The Making*, *Vendetta*, *Dominator* and *Tusker*.

1990 Activision loses its lengthy court case to Magnavox and its deal with System 3 is later severed as a result of that case.

1991 Further expanding on the extremely popular *The Last Ninja* series, System 3 release *Last Ninja 3*

1992 *Putty* starts a new and lucrative and critically-acclaimed franchise for System 3. With a sequel appearing two years later.

1994 *Putty Squad* becomes a highly popular sequel for the series. Which was revisited almost 20 years later in 2013.

1997 System 3 moves into real-time strategy games with the slightly bizzare *Constructor* for the PC.

2000 The company strikes a deal with many Japanese companies and begins a lucrative relationship with them by importing a fresh wave of titles to the UK, including *Toshinden 4*.

2003 With its new label, Play It, a host of cheap and more casually-orientated games are released for the PS2 as well as other consoles.

2007 A new version of *Impossible Mission* is released just over 20 years after the original C64 version was released.

2008 Mark Cale indulges his petrol-headed love of cars with *Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli* for the PS3, PS2, PSP and Nintendo DS

2009 After *Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli*, System 3 works with Ferrari on a race sim on Ferrari's website.

2010 System 3 decides to move away from selling 'hard' copies of games and begins to concentrate on digital.

2013 A reimagining of *Putty Squad* is released for the PS Vita, 3DS, PS3, Xbox 360 and Windows 8. Amazingly, it's also finally released on the Amiga.



» [Amiga] *Last Ninja 3* was an Amiga hit but it was intended to be released on the ill-fated Konix Multisystem first.

▶ into its development and Jon Hare, who had been working on the artwork for LT Software, was about to leave. At the same time, Emerson decided he wanted to leave System 3. Mark bought his shares but he was now running the company alone.

Hope was on the horizon, though. Jon's new firm, Sensible Software, created *Twister: Mother of Harlots* which, as we touched on earlier, made a huge impact at the PCW Show for all the wrong reasons (it was sensibly yet bizarrely renamed *Twister: Mother Of Charlotte* when it was eventually released). Even better, Activision was not put off by the resulting PCW Show furore and it signed a deal with System 3. "It was quite amazing," says Mark.

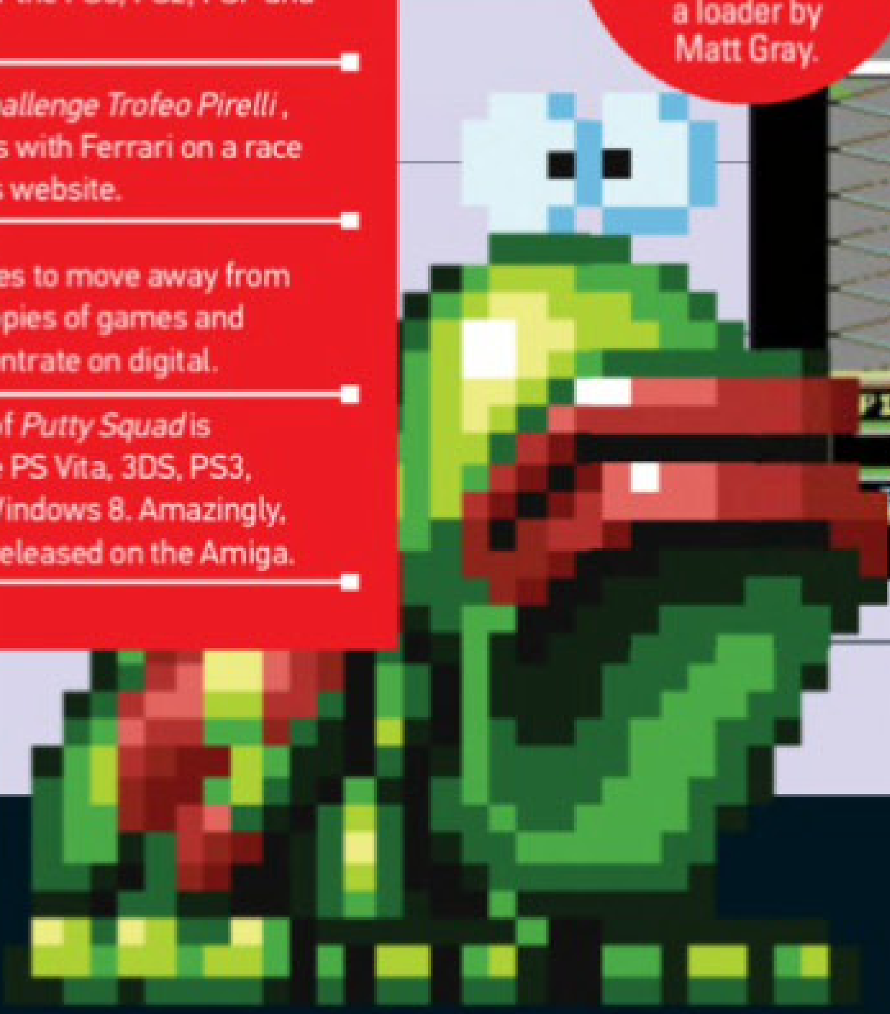
The deal gave System 3 an agreed cash advance on each game the company produced based on the design documents that it supplied. Activision would fund the development and marketing and take a commission of around 15 per cent of the gross, handing System 3 the balance. The deal was very similar to the way the music industry dealt with record labels and, crucially, it meant Activision was not publishing System 3's games, only distributing them. "We'd get a large advance on the games we were planning," says Mark. "You could only dream of a deal like that now; it just would not happen, it's too risky. But it was all breaking edge stuff at the time."



» [Amiga] Myth went down a storm on Amiga and Commodore 64 – *Zzap!* awarded it 94 per cent.



» [C64] *Bangkok Knights* featured music by the legendary Rob Hubbard, with a loader by Matt Gray.



Twister became the first game released under the joint venture with Activision. *International Karate*, meanwhile, was rejected despite its shake-up at the hands of Archer MacLean who had just finished coding *Dropzone*. It was later released by Epyx, which rebranded it *World Karate Championship* in America; but the missed opportunity was a mistake by Activision, given the game shot to the top of US charts. "Activision realised that I knew exactly what I was doing and it made life much easier," Mark says.

The decision not to publish had been made by Scott Orr, founder of the sports videogame label, Gamestar, which Activision had acquired. "I've still got the report which said the game was typical European rubbish," says Mark. "He said the product would never work in America, that it didn't do this, that and the other and needed to be about stats." Still, Mark could breathe a sigh of relief that all had turned out well. "In September 1985, I'd persuaded my mother to mortgage her house and throw everything into that PCW Show so for everything to work out so well was amazing."

It wasn't all plain sailing. Data East claimed *World Championship Karate* was infringing its rights to the arcade game, *Karate Champ*, and the case rumbled on for years, eventually being won by Epyx. "The decision was that you can't copyright an idea; a karate game is a karate game," Mark says.



» [Amiga] Despite reviews at the time, the original Amiga version of *Putty Squad* went MIA. It finally arrived in 2013.

By 1987, it had moved from the South Bank to smart new top-floor offices in London's Hatton Gardens at the centre of the UK's diamond trade as it geared up for the release of *The Last Ninja*. "Just when you thought nobody would come up with a new and interesting twist on the martial arts formula, System 3 manages it," said *Computer And Videogames* magazine upon receiving a copy.

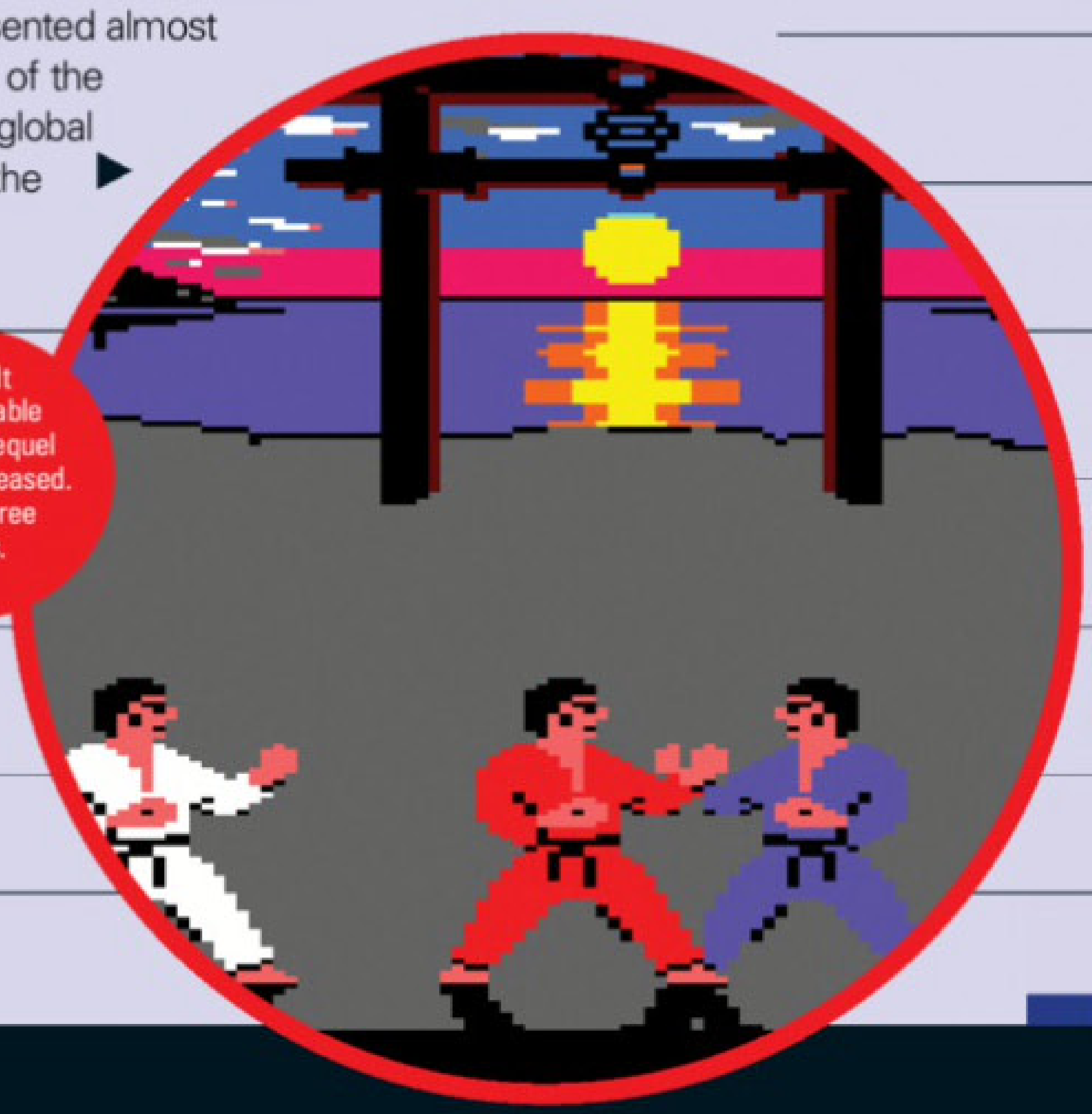
The Last Ninja may have been late, but it was a huge success on the Commodore 64, selling more than 7.5 million units. Commodore's computer was also becoming very important to System 3. "We had the skillset on that machine", says Mark. "We had some of the best artists and programmers and talent in Europe and we had a brilliant reputation." So much so, Activision would also use System 3's art team for some of its licences, including *Predator* in 1987.

In 1988, the brilliant *Bangkok Nights* was launched to build on the success of *International Karate*. "It was the first game to try and have different character attributes in the fighting game and different skillsets," says Mark, who remembers flying journalists to a Thai Boxing match in China to promote the game. "It was one of the first international launches that was done in a different country. The idea and concept of *Bangkok Knights* got *Street Fighter* going."

This game was followed by *Last Ninja 2: Back With A Vengeance* which sold more than 13 million copies and won a host of industry awards, but trouble wasn't far away. System 3's deal with Activision was about to be put in jeopardy thanks to Magnavox suing Activision for infringing its original home videogame patents.

It plunged Activision down a path towards bankruptcy (it later emerged and successfully reorganised into the powerhouse it is today) and that caused problems for System 3.

"We represented almost 80 per cent of the company's global revenue in the ▶



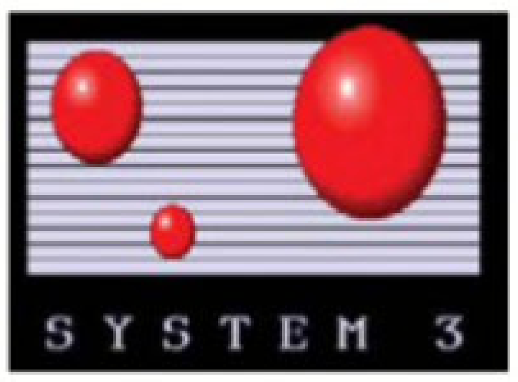
»[CPC] It was inevitable that an *IK* sequel would be released. *IK+* had three fighters.

THE DNA OF SYSTEM 3



Original games

There is no doubting the impact games such as *International Karate*, *The Last Ninja* and *Super Putty* have had. *The Last Ninja* is seen as the pioneer of the isometric adventure, *IK* took martial arts to another level, and *Putty* squeezed fresh life from the platform genre.



Top talent

System 3 has been good at spotting talent. Over the years, it has worked with big names including the likes of Archer MacLean, John Twiddy, Paul Docherty, Hugh Riley, and Chris Butler among, many others. "They are blessed with amazing ability," Mark says.



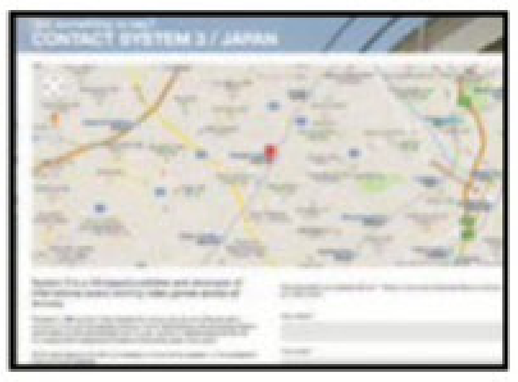
Mark Cale

Co-founder and CEO Mark Cale is the face of the company and someone with a keen eye not only for a game but for marketing. As well as heading System 3 itself, he has overseen the company's development arm Studio 3 and the casual label, Play It.



Controversy

Aside from the rather controversial PCW Show and extra 'goodies' bundled with *Last Ninja 2*, a Norwegian reader of Comodore *Commodore User* blamed a disc-based copy protection system for damaging his C128's disc drive.



Outside influences

In the early days, System 3 looked to America in the hope of opening up a larger market for its games but it also seized the chance to import many titles. In the Noughties, however, the attention shifted to Japan, where it continues to have an office to this day.



Independence

System 3 has remained an independent company throughout its lifespan. It has remained in control of its own development affairs and it claims to be the last surviving British independent publisher from the grassroots years of the Eighties.



Great graphics

Although Mark Cale says playability is the most important factor a game, System 3 put a lot of work into graphics. In the Eighties, System 3 coined its own slogan: 'Graphically Amazing!', which it used to highlight the visuals of its releases.



Long waits

System 3's development cycles were lengthy affairs. Graphic artist Paul Docherty once commented that System 3 projects "languished in development for what seemed like ages." But Mark says: "We don't release any of our games until we are happy with them."



▶ 1988-1989 period but we were never paid the full amount of money. If we had, perhaps some things at System 3 would have been a lot bigger."

The deal between System 3 and Activision ended in 1990 but the partnership had served Mark's company well, helping *Myth: History* *In The Making* and *Dominator* become very successful releases. *Vendetta* and *Tusker* also sold rather well in 1989 and System 3 capitalised on *International Karate* with *IK+*. "I still like the way the graphics worked on that game," says Mark. "We had a real Japanese-inspired style to the characters."

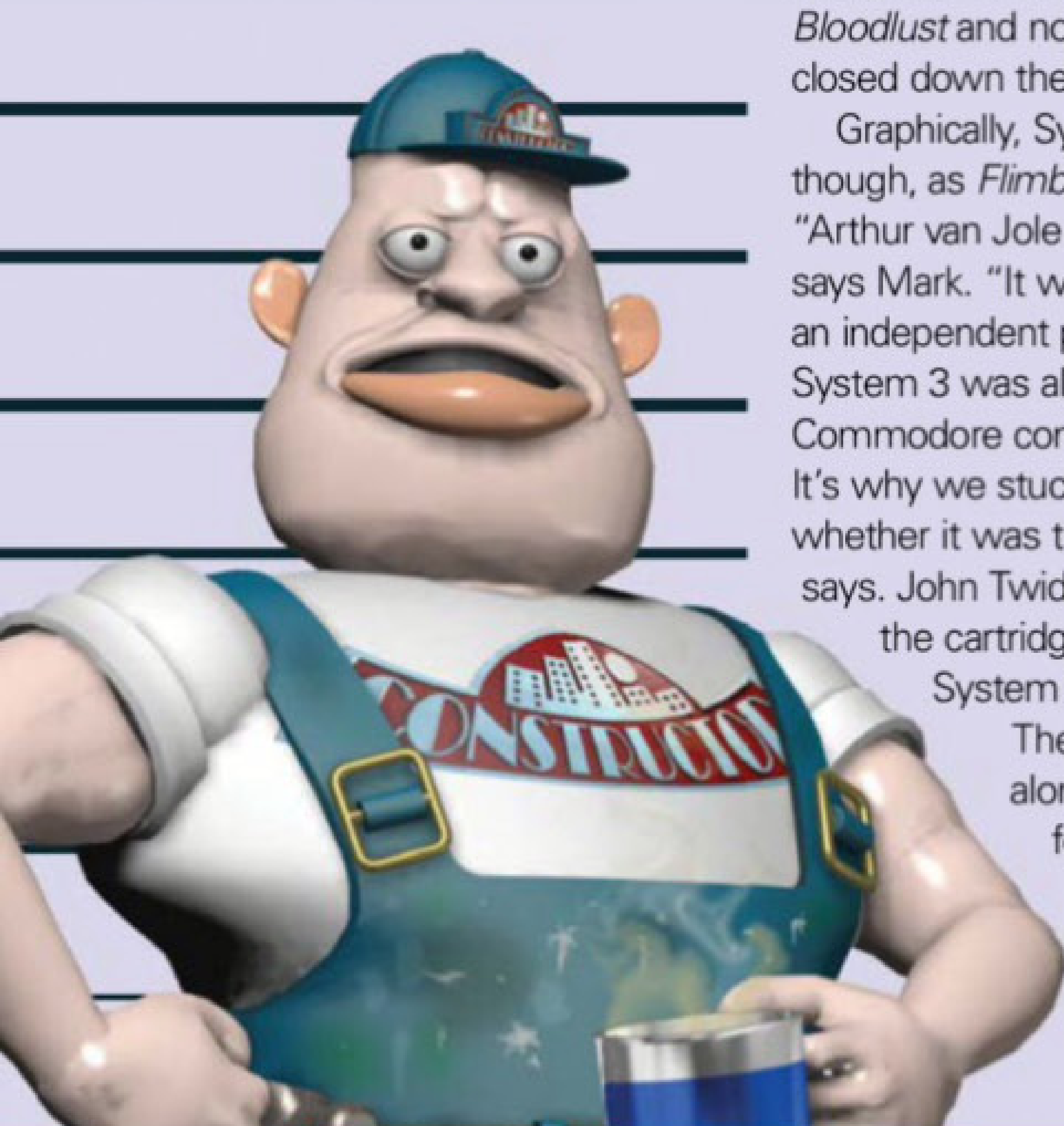
Yet System 3 was still a small company albeit with talented developers which, by now, also included the likes of John Twiddy, Hugh Riley, Bob Stephenson, Robin Levy, Dan Malone and Joe Walker. Some of their titles they worked on never saw the light of day, however. "We worked on an arcade game called *Bloodlust* and no one knows about it because Atari closed down the game, though," says Mark.

Graphically, System 3's games continued to excel, though, as *Flimbo's Quest* was praised for its visuals. "Arthur van Jole was the artist and it looked great," says Mark. "It was the first game we had done as an independent publisher away from Activision." System 3 was also starting to bundle games with Commodore computers. "It made us a lot of money. It's why we stuck with Commodore so much, whether it was the C64, C64 GS or the Amiga," Mark says. John Twiddy worked with Commodore on the cartridges used in the C64 GS console and System 3 released games such as *Myth*.

The Last Ninja 3 was released in 1991 alongside gems such as *Turbo Charge* for the C64 and *Fuzzball* for the Amiga ("*Last Ninja 3* got 100% in one review," says Mark). But in 1992, one game stood out: *Super Putty*. "It was a very important game and it allowed us to move into consoles with the SNES," Mark says. "But we were struggling in an evolving videogame market, making great games, but not having the cash and wherewithal to step up and be a cartridge publisher for consoles. We just relied on trying to do joint ventures with people."

Super Putty paved the way for *Desert Fighter* on the SNES, a isometric shooter developed by Opus Studio of Japan which came hot on the heels of EA's *Desert Strike* and which SETA published in America and Japan as *A.S.P. Air Strike Patrol*. But although a sequel to *Super Putty* was released for the SNES called *Putty Squad*, the next few years proved fallow for System 3. The company wanted to produce games for the PlayStation but Mark says it initially struggled to get a licence due to external gaming politics.


» [DS] System 3 has made games spanning four decades. *Power Play Pool* was released in 2009.



ULTIMATE SYSTEM 3?

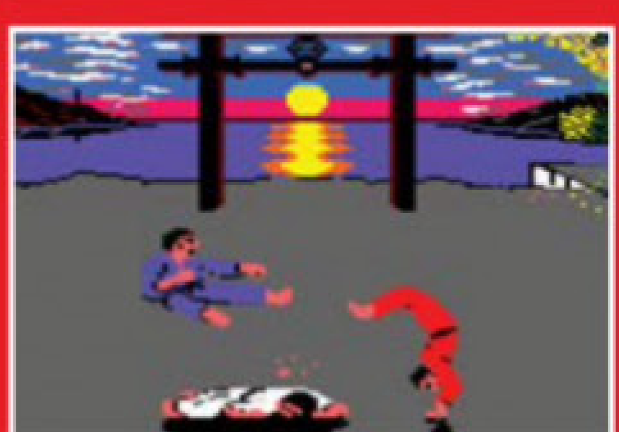
The gaming deal that never came to be

System 3's profile rose following the release of its best-selling franchise, *The Last Ninja*. One of the companies interested in working with System 3 was Ultimate Play The Game. It approached Mark Cale with an offer of working on a venture. "Ultimate liked *The Last Ninja* and it was working with Nintendo which wanted to see the game on the NES which I hadn't heard of in any detail at the time," says Mark. "I turned Ultimate down on the basis of assurances from Activision, but it was a missed opportunity. Ultimate became Rare and it made brilliant games like *Donkey Kong Country* and it eventually got bought out by Microsoft. Looking back, it was a mistake not to have taken them up." Mark says the partnership would have worked well had it gone ahead. "Those guys were some of the best talent at the time and they utilised their skillset to engineer Nintendo games to perfection. But their C64 games, for whatever reason, fell short of the mark a bit– that's where we had an advantage over them. We were using some of the best C64 pixel artists in the world and we were very fortunate."



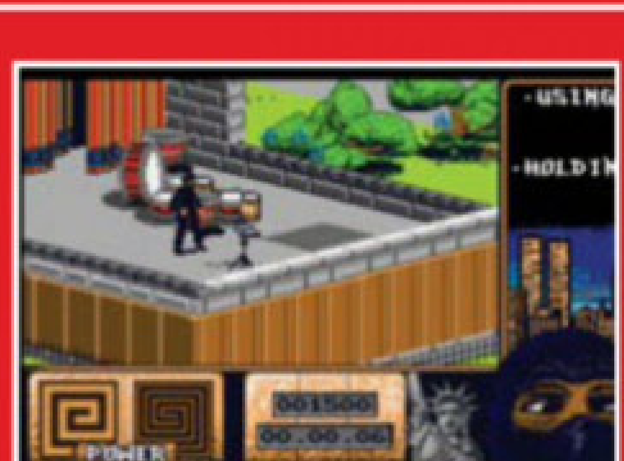

» [PSOne] *Silent Bomber* mixed up the top-down shooter genre by switching out gunplay for, you guessed it, bombplay.

DEFINING GAMES



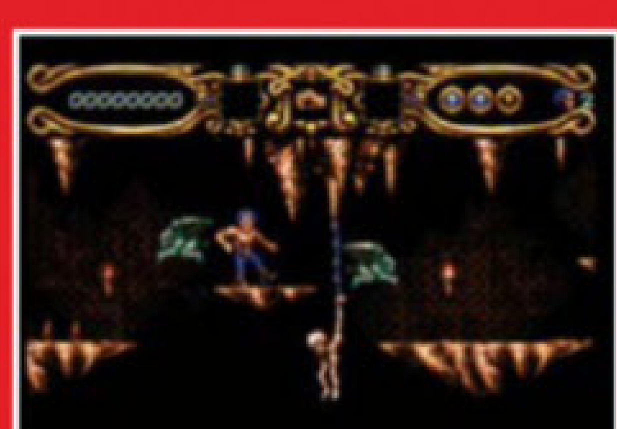
International Karate + 1987

Developed by Archer MacLean, the 2D karate simulator may have only had one backdrop but it introduced an extra karateka, pitting three fighters against each other in a race to score six points. A bonus game would then kick in which involved deflecting balls or bombs. The game catapulted to number one in European charts and it won various awards.



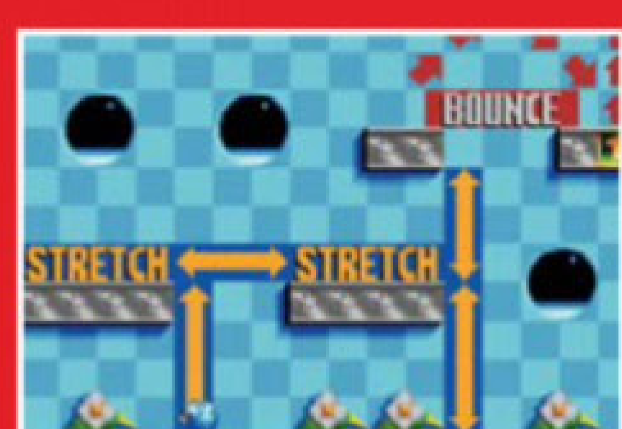
The Last Ninja 2: Back With A Vengeance 1988

The debut action-adventure game was problematic for System 3 (some staff left the project, believing Mark Cale's vision for the game was too ambitious) but it had become a success, making a sequel inevitable. *The Last Ninja 2* moved the action from the past to a modern-day New York, bringing with it improved graphics and animation.



Myth: History in the Making 1989

The fantasy 2D platformer *Myth* was never released for the Atari ST which was a shame because players were missing out on what was arguably System 3's finest moment. The game revolved around many far-flung locations related to myths and legends. It was packed with puzzles, enemies and weapons and it entailed a lot of running and jumping.



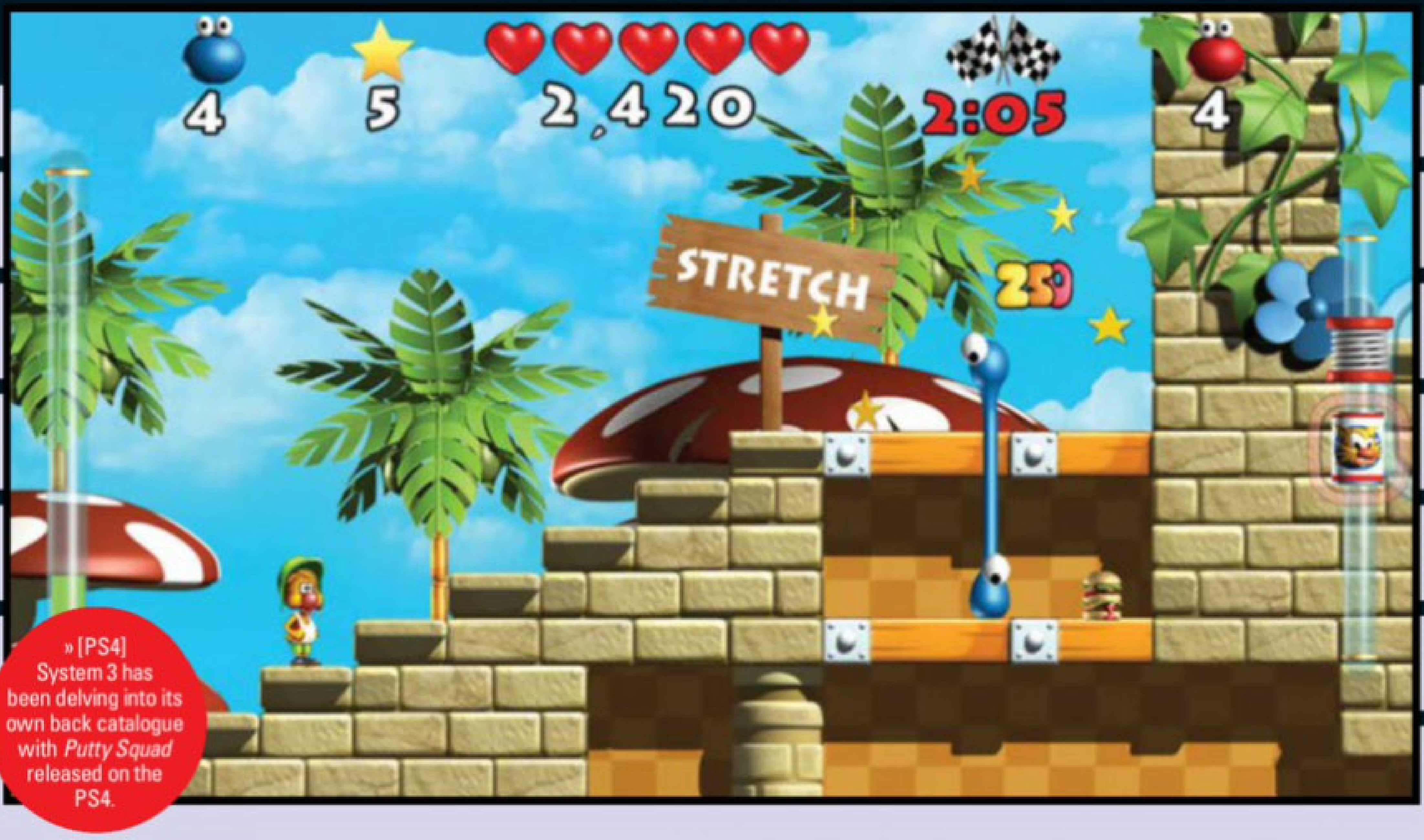
Putty 1992

The *Putty* series was conceived by artist Phil Thornton who spent a lot of time in India. On one of his visits, he developed a high temperature which caused him to hallucinate and he saw parts of his room merge together. Inspired by what he 'saw', he pitched the idea to System 3. By the time it was released, the game also included walking Scouse sausages and Terminator-like carrots.



Constructor 1997

With System 3 struggling to make the step-up to 32-bit consoles, *Constructor* was created for PC and marked the publisher's first title for the format. It could have easily been mistaken for a classic from the likes of Bullfrog, and the involvement of the Mafia, violent tenants and all sorts of underhand shenanigans helped it to become an a much appreciated real-time strategy game.



» [PS4] System 3 has been delving into its own back catalogue with *Putty Squad* released on the PS4.

The next game, *Constructor* on the PC, did not come out until 1997. *Constructor* was a real-time strategy game which used many of the toolsets created for *Bloodlust*, the game System 3 worked on for Atari. "It was something quite revolutionary from us," Mark says. "It was our first big PC game and it went on to be a huge success, selling millions of copies. We teamed up with Acclaim to give us a global reach and it got great reviews everywhere."

Constructor eventually found its way to the PlayStation in 1998 but it would be 2000 – in the last days of the PlayStation's life – when System 3 would get into its stride with Sony's machine. It hit the ground running releasing *Silent Bomber*, *Toshinden 4* and *Guilty Gear* and in 2002 it launched *Crisis Beat*. "We had teamed up with Virgin Interactive as our affiliate publisher it went on from there," says Mark.

> **"We had some of the best artists and programmers in Europe"**
> MARK CALE DISCUSSES SYSTEM 3'S TALENT

"*Silent Bomber* is still one of my favourite games and I liked *Toshinden 4* a lot. For us to actually get and manage to publish *Toshinden 4*, said a lot about the value of our plans and outreach globally as a relatively small company."

System 3 was far more prolific once the PlayStation 2 rolled in, and it launched a new label, called Play It, for games on the then new and popular console. Play It included games that had been created to appeal to a casual games market. The company dusted off buried Intellivision classics for a 60 game compilation, called *Intellivision Lives*. The company also released a staggering amount of games including, *Casino Challenge*, Seek *And Destroy*, *Motorseige*: *Warriors Of Primetime*, *Grooverider: Slot Car Racing*, *Road Trip Advance*, *Underworld*, *Chess Challenger*, *International Snooker Championship*, *Pinball*, *Road Trip Adventure*, *Castle of Shikigami 2: War Of The Worlds*, *Strike Force Bowling*, *Guncom 2*, *World Championship Poker*, *International Pool Championship*, *TriggerMan*, *Gungrave Overdose*, *1945: I+II The Arcade Games*, *Arcade Classics* and *Crazy Chicken X*.



» [PSOne] Although it was late to the PlayStation party, System 3 published a number of games on the console including *Guilty Gear* and *Silent Bomber*.

It was quite some list but even that doesn't take into account the PlayStation games released under Play It – *Creatures: Raised In Space* and *James Pond Codename:* *Robocod*. "From 2004 to 2006 in Europe, System 3 was the seventh largest publisher on Sony in terms of volume," Mark says. "We had more units than most people. We even remade *Toshinden* for the Play It range to make it more casual. *James Pond* sold very well in Russia and the Middle East."

In 2007, the label was dropped and it allowed *Gottlieb Pinball Classics* to be released under the name System 3. Mark's company was on a roll. It raided gaming's archives to produce a new version of *Impossible Mission* in 2007 and it moved into PlayStation 3 development. "Sony changed its manufacturing model for the PS3 which meant the Play It model wouldn't work well financially – you couldn't get to a £9.99 or £14.99 price which was a shame," he explains. "We focused again on higher publishing. The first title we launched on PS3 was *Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli*."

System 3 continued to produce games for Nintendo though with casual titles like *PowerPlay Pool*. But over the past few years, as well as continuing to create Ferrari games, the company has been spending its fourth decade in the industry going back over gaming's back catalogue.

Mark is optimistic about the future. "We've re-launched the Play It label in the US and Europe. We offer indie developers a opportunity whereby we're able to get their products into boxes, on to shelves," he says. "We're enjoying the opportunities. The market's a lot more competitive now. We're proud of our decades in gaming and we want to be around for a great deal longer."

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Mark Cale



Mark remains the CEO of System 3, a role he has now held for close to 33 years. He lives in London with his wife and children but he is currently looking to further expand his company in the US and he is scouting for new offices in Hawaii. As well as producing games for traditional systems including the PS4, System 3 is also eyeing the mobile phone and tablet market.

Jon Hare



Having created *Twister: Mother of Charlotte*, Jon went on to have a very successful career in gaming as the co-founder of Sensible Software. With *Cannon Fodder* and *Sensible Soccer* to his name, he has ensured his permanent place in British games programming history.

John Twiddy



John joined System 3 in 1986 as the head of development He left for a short while to set up his own company, called Vivid Image, with Hugh Riley and Mev Dink but he returned a few years later. John's most recent hands-on involvement at System 3 was as head of production on *Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli* in 2008. He was also the project manager of the new *Impossible Mission* in 2007.





BIO

Having wowed critics with the unconventional arena brawler, *Power Stone*, Capcom quickly put a sequel into production and decided to turn everything about the original up to 11. Four new characters joined the roster and fights were expanded to allow for four players, while each stage was given multiple parts. While reviewers showered the game with praise, *Power Stone 2*'s sales weren't so great. As a result, it was the last in the series and remained exclusive to the Dreamcast until Capcom converted both games to the PSP in the form of *Power Stone Collection* in 2006.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Power Stone 2

» **PLATFORM:** DREAMCAST » **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM » **RELEASED:** 2000

We can still distinctly remember starting up *Power Stone 2* for the first time – it was an exciting moment, as we'd had a lot of fun with the first game and the four-player mode seemed like an inspired inclusion. Other changes came as more of a surprise, though. Starting off with the airship stage, our first fight quickly descended into frantic mayhem as we tried to fend off three of our friends in an arena without walls, and what happened next only heightened the chaos.

A large 'Go!' symbol flashed into view as the left side of the airship began to fall away from the main body, shortly followed by the right. Now confined to a small area, the fight continued before the entire airship itself began to explode and fail, leaving the players in freefall. A heated scramble for a fall-breaking umbrella ensued, and upon landing the fight concluded in a more traditional *Power Stone* arena. After going through all that, we were desperate to see the amazing transitions the following stages would offer! *



MORE CLASSIC POWER STONE 2 MOMENTS

Overkilled



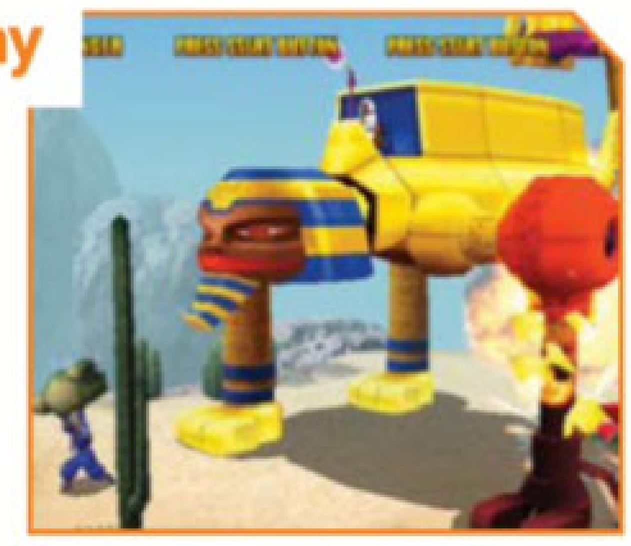
Gathering the three gems required to access your super form is still a thrilling experience, particularly as you can cause more chaos with three opponents. We're fond of finding someone on low life and laying waste to them with the most powerful attacks possible, as Falcon is doing with this missile barrage – there's no sense in showing mercy, after all.

Vehicular Violence



The crates, bazookas and swords of the original game were great, but *Power Stone 2* raises the stakes with gun emplacements and even this nifty tank, which awaits at the bottom of the airship stage. You won't outmanoeuvre any opponents while you're using it, but you'll definitely outgun them – just watch out for catapult fire from the left.

The Enemy Of My Enemy



While the main battles in *Power Stone 2* are free-for-all affairs with no fixed allegiances, boss battles pit the previous stage's survivors against an enormous enemy. Suddenly the game shifts to co-operative play as you work together to try to defeat the guardian, keeping your former enemy alive so that you can settle old scores in the next stage.

Crazy Climbers



Half-way through the castle stage, the grounds are bombarded and you'll have to hurry inside by ascending the platforms to its upper entrance. Of course, with three opponents trying to do the same this isn't exactly *Super Mario Bros.* – you can still bash each other about on the way up, though, in order to make it inside the castle and avoid any damage from outside.





IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI INC
» **DEVELOPER:** ATARI INC
» **RELEASED:** 1981
» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE AND VARIOUS HOME SYSTEMS
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

CREATING CENTIPEDE

Dona Bailey explains to Darran Jones how she went from working at General Motors to creating Atari's memorable shoot-'em-up

Back in the Seventies and early Eighties, Atari was a hotbed of creativity, delivering an astonishing amount of original gaming experiences. It was also a company that was dominated by men, meaning that any game that featured the involvement of a female developer was going to be of interest to the press.

And interest certainly surrounded *Centipede*, Atari's iconic shoot-'em-up from 1981. Virtually everything about it, from its pastel-coloured visuals to its trackball-assisted controls made it stand apart from its peers. The fact that it was being co-developed by one of Atari's few female engineers couldn't have hurt its reputation, either. In short, *Centipede* just felt different.

The story of Dona's involvement with *Centipede* begins in the early Seventies when she was still studying hard at college. "I had two courses as an undergraduate where we had a chance to experiment with programming, and I thought it was fun and appealing, like solving a pattern puzzle or working a jigsaw," she tells us. "Later, when I had an opportunity to use programming to change digital displays, I thought it was as alluring as alchemy because the work became a means to make art. I love any opportunity for making art with digital tools, like Photoshop, Premiere, Final Cut, Blender, and so on."

Dona's interest in programming saw her eventually become a software engineer and she soon landed herself a job at General Motors. It wasn't long though before Dona realised that her true calling was elsewhere and she tells us about the game that was the cause of her epiphany. "In 1980, I was introduced



"CENTIPEDE 101"

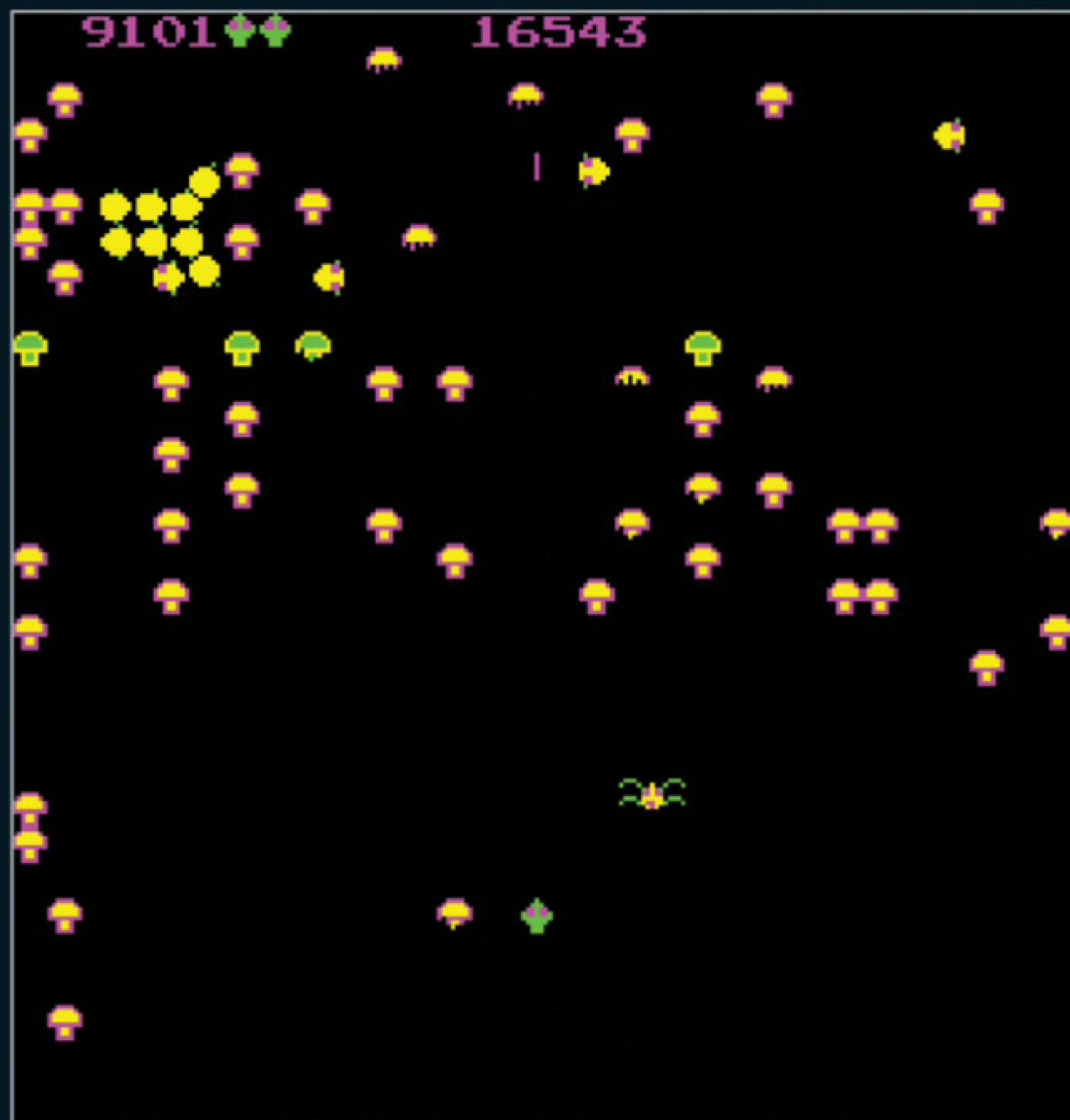
■ *Centipede* is a fast-paced shoot-'em-up with an insect theme. The player uses a trackball to take out the many-segmented parts of a centipede before it can reach the bottom of the screen. Mushrooms hinder your progress and must be shot down, while other insects will also randomly appear and cause you trouble. It's notable for being one of the first arcade games co-created by a female designer, in this case, Dona Bailey.

to *Space Invaders*, the game, because of *Space Invaders*, the song by The Pretenders, and I recognised that the game looked like the displays of the 6502 microprocessor I was programming at the time for General Motors. I knew games would be more fun to work on than GM cars, and I set my ambition on becoming a game programmer for Atari."

Dona's ambition became a reality and she found herself working as the sole female software engineer in Atari's arcade division. Dona was rubbing shoulders with the likes of Ed Logg and Dave Theurer and remembers being outnumbered by a ratio of at least 30 to 1. She has no regrets about her time at Atari, however, recalling the following about the situation she found herself in there. "I've always said it is the closest I'll ever come to knowing what it's like to be in a fraternity. It was like watching the opposite of a chick flick every day for more than two years."

In the two years that Dona was working at Atari, only one game actually saw the inside of arcades, but it was a damned good one that felt remarkably fresh compared to other shooters of the time. Interestingly, the idea for *Centipede* already existed at Atari, but only as a concept. It would take Dona and Ed Logg to make it an actual reality. "The idea for *Centipede* came from a notebook of game concepts collected during Atari brainstorming sessions in the years before I was there," Dona begins. "Most of the other game ideas in the notebook were based on lasers, wars in space, sports, and 'shoot down' this and that type of equipment. *Centipede*, described as 'a multi-segmented bug crawls out on the screen and gets shot, piece by piece,' sounded the most appealing to me. I could envision the bug looking distinctive, with a gliding, turning, and twisting motion."

Dona and Ed got to work, but difficulties were soon encountered, mainly because what Dona was doing was so different from her work at General Motors. Suffice to say, *Centipede* became something of a baptism of fire for the software engineer… "Before working at Atari, while I was at GM, I had been responsible only for carefully defined modules in a



» [Arcade] The spider moves around at 45° angles that can make him a right bugger to hit.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ASTEROIDS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1979

GAUNTLET
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1985

SAN FRANCISCO RUSH: EXTREME RACING
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1996

CENTIPEDE IN BITS

A segmented history of Centipede



MILLIPEDE (1982)

■ Ed Logg's sequel ramps everything up enormously by adding a large number of new insects, including mosquitos, earwigs and beetles, all of which greatly affect the core gameplay. Despite the numerous additions, or perhaps because of them, *Millipede* is a lot easier than its predecessor, and therefore (dare we say it) a lot more fun.



CENTIPEDE (1992)

■ The actual port of *Centipede* on the Master System's Arcade Smash Hits is not a port at all. Instead, it has elements of both *Centipede* and *Millipede*, which makes it quite different to both games. While it's a solid blaster, it's also a tough one, as you can never seem to move quickly enough and the screen quickly fills up with those pesky mushrooms.



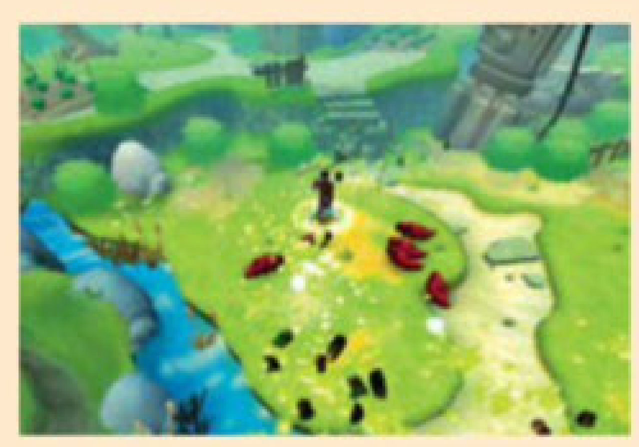
CENTIPEDE (1998)

■ Hasbro rebooted several Atari arcade games, including this decent re-imagination that's certainly worth taking the time to play. Being able to defend human villages from the rampaging insects is a nice touch, and a useful radar lets you know when offscreen enemies are close. There's also a third-person mode too, but it's not particularly easy to use.



CENTIPEDE (2005)

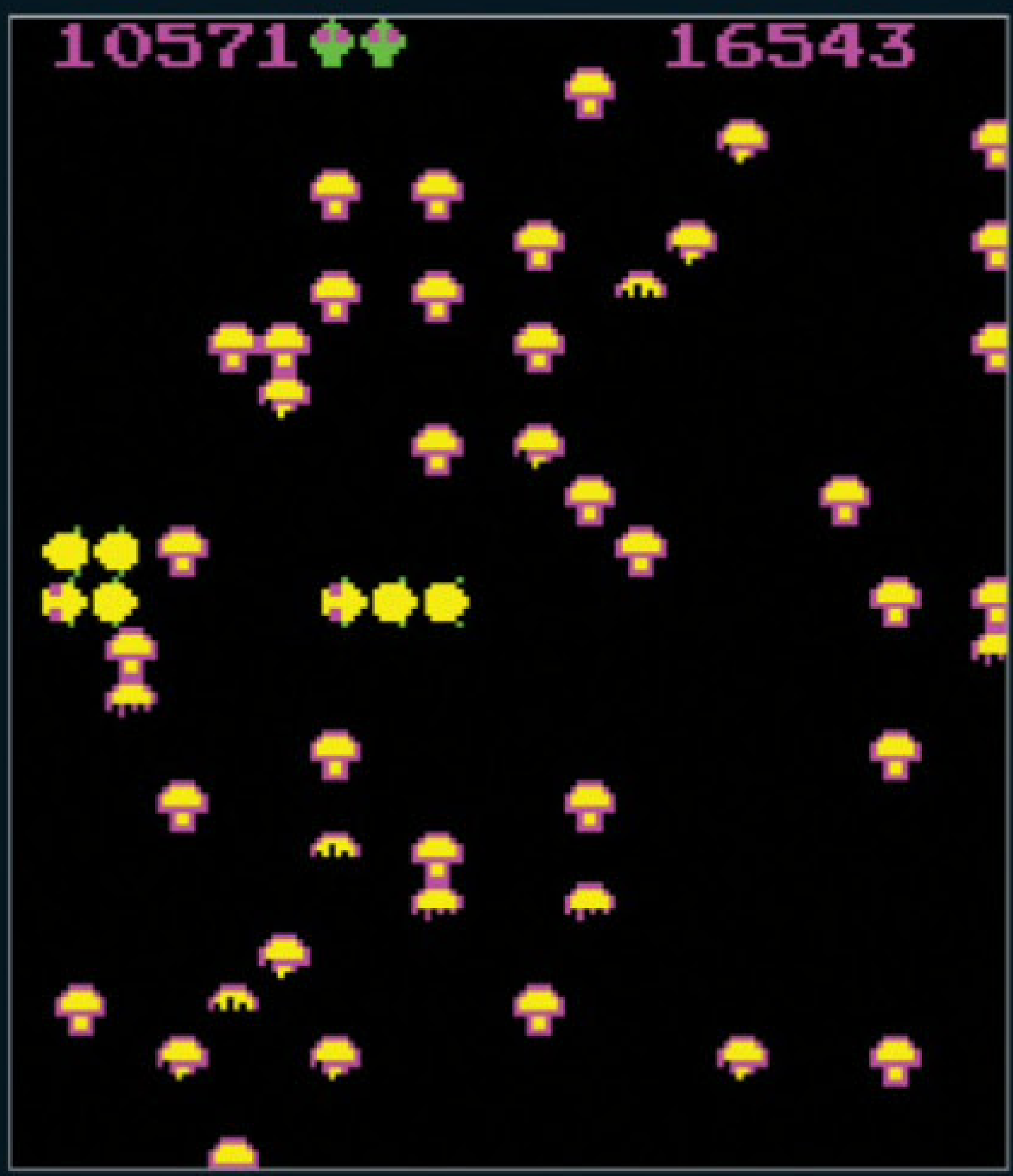
■ While the idea of updating arcade classics is a sound one, the execution of *Retro Arcade Classics* on DS was atrocious. Its update of *Centipede* was particularly naff and not worth bothering with, boasting an eye-bleeding colour screen and overly simple gameplay that made it a doddle to play. A complete waste of time that sullies the *Centipede* name.



CENTIPEDE: INFESTATION (2011)

■ Although Wayforward Technologies managed to breath fresh new life into Konami's *Contra* series, it didn't manage the same trick with *Centipede: Infestation*. It's a turgid little shooter that comes across as a poor man's *Robotron*. It has some relatively nice ideas, but it's all executed rather poorly and is best ignored.

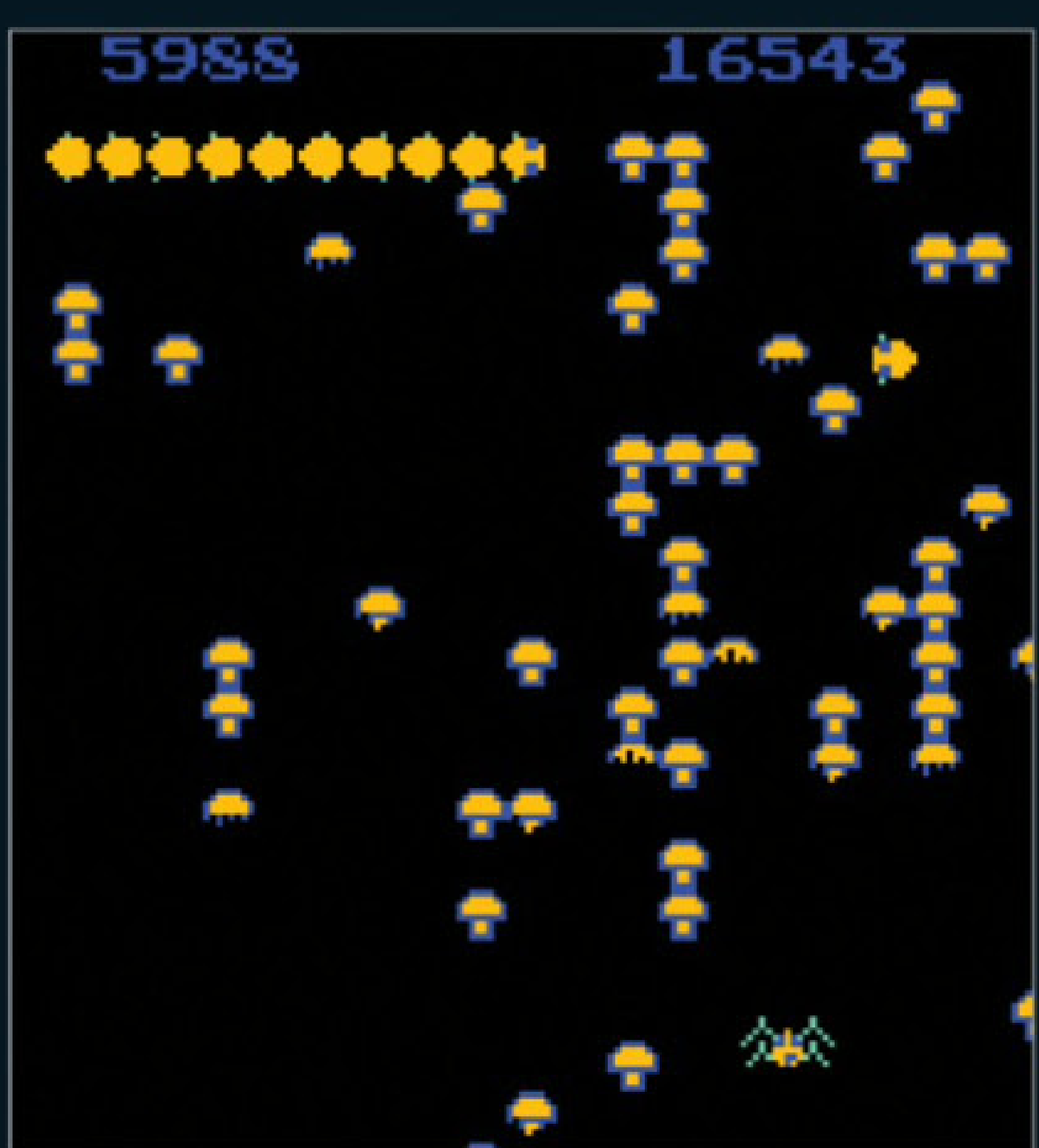




» If you let the centipede reach the bottom of the screen it will start multiplying.



» [Arcade] Dealing with split centipedes is always a pain in the backside. You will need to shoot the separate parts as quickly as possible.



» [Arcade] Clearing mushrooms is critical as they obstruct your movement and make it easier for the centipede to reach you.

larger program," Dona tells us. "I had never handled the 6502 interrupt cycles in a program, I had never set up data structures for a program, I couldn't read schematics, I had never worked with audio, and so on. I was adequate at some aspects of 6502 programming, and my strong point was that I loved writing code for visual displays and graphic design. I needed help getting started on each game feature, and I benefited greatly from gameplay advice from other more experienced game programmers. Every day was a learning experience for me."

There were other difficulties that Dona and Ed encountered while working on their classic arcade game. Namely the fact that the controls that were in place just didn't seem to be working. *Centipede*'s original control scheme was based on the five-button setup of *Asteroids*, which should come as no surprise considering that was another game that Ed Logg worked on. What might be surprising however is that the control setup was stopping Dona from making progress in the very game she was working on. "I was terrible while using the buttons to play [*Centipede*]" she admits to us. "I think it was Steve Calfee who noticed that I couldn't play well using buttons, and we tried a joystick after that to see if it made gameplay more fun. I liked the joystick better, but it still wasn't as much fun as I hoped for while playing. Finally, we tried the small trackball, and that was it for me. It was so easy to use that I could forget what my hands were doing and just enjoyed the interaction on the screen." The addition of the trackball made a huge difference to the way *Centipede* played and all of a sudden it was far easier to deal with the game's hectic pace. There's a wonderful tactile feel to an original *Centipede* arcade machine that no amount of emulation can produce and it requires great precision and skill to use. Dona also feels that the use of the trackball is one of the reasons why *Centipede* was one of the earliest arcade games to appeal to both men and women. "I think the trackball made *Centipede* more fun to play than other games of the time," admits Dona, "and I think it looked visually appealing for its time."

> **"I drew a grasshopper that shows up in the test mode, but I ran out of space for coding it into the program"**
> Dona Bailey

Ah yes, it's certainly worth mentioning *Centipede*'s vibrant visuals, which, along with its distinctive insectoid theme, helped it stand apart from so many other games of the time. The pastel colours that Dona and Ed used gave *Centipede* a surreal look that helped make it look enticing to those who had played the likes of *Asteroids*, *Missile Command* and *Space Invaders*."

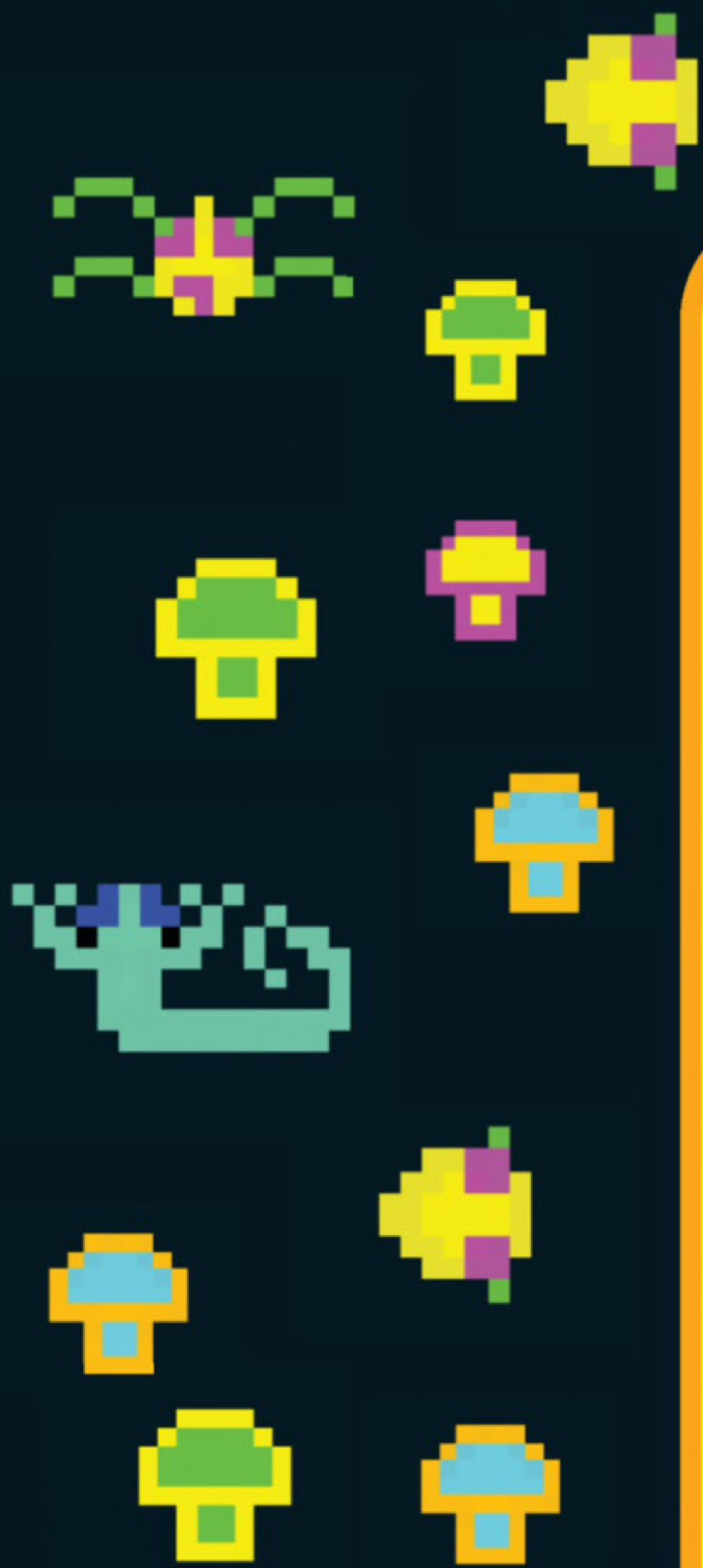
"I wanted *Centipede*'s graphics to pop off the screen's background, and I felt I needed more than standard primary colours," explains Dona on the reason behind *Centipede*'s visuals. "I was thrilled when our technician made an adjustment that added the pastel palette. I enjoyed finding all the colour contrasts to make each level of the game shimmer and glow."

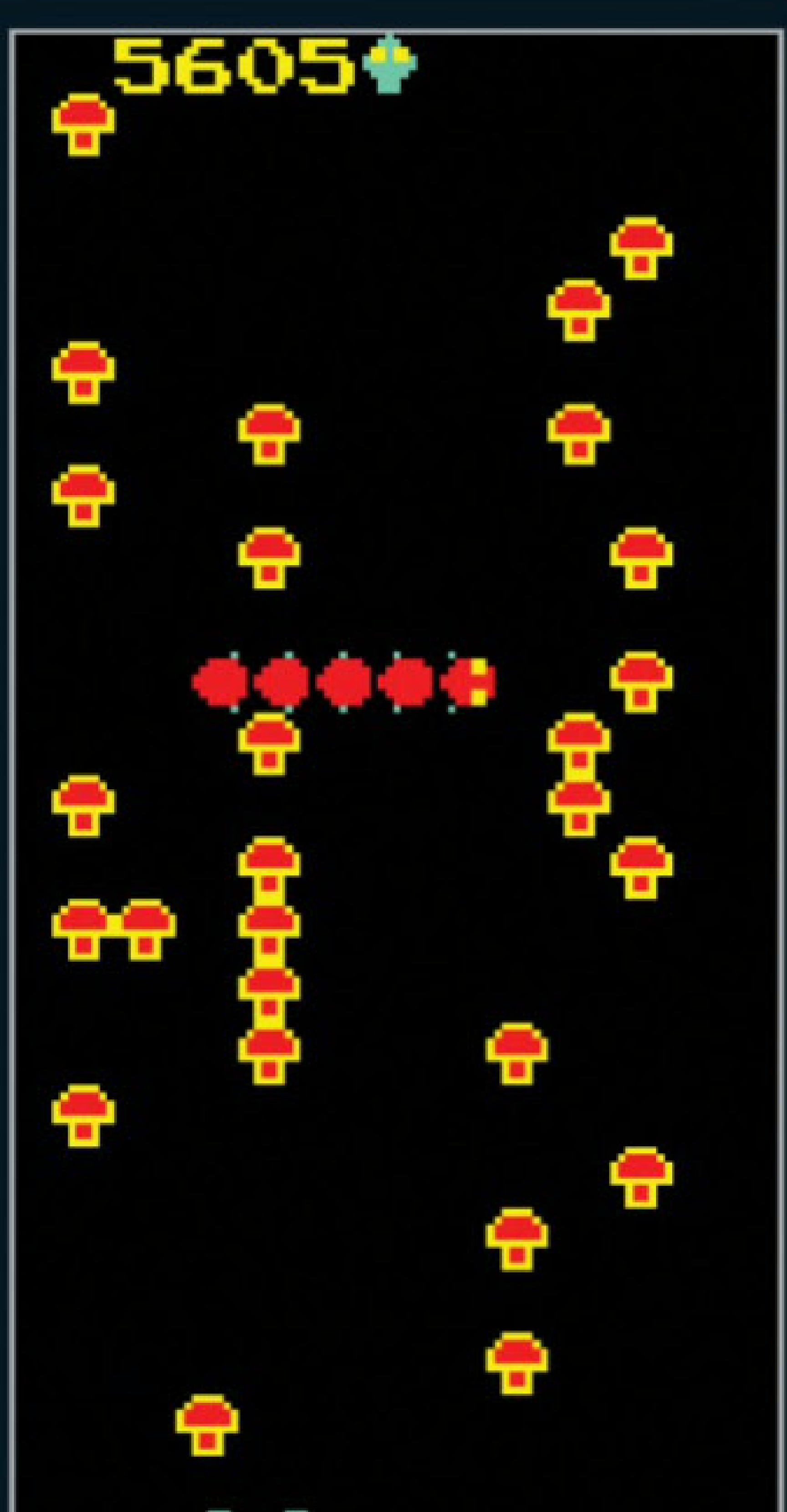
Although *Centipede* was one of the earliest arcade games that appealed to women, it was never actually created to lure the female of the species into their local arcade. It just happened completely by accident. "No, I don't think so, or at least those were not my intentions," begins Dona when we asked her if *Centipede* had been designed to specifically appeal to a female demographic. "I believed we were trying to make a game that looked good and was fun for everyone to play. It's true that I hoped *Centipede* would be noticed and enjoyed by women, but I also hoped men would like it, since that was essential for success. I was hopeful that children would like to play it, too. I wanted everyone to like it."

It's arguable that one of the reasons that so many people liked *Centipede* was due to its recognisable themes. After all, everyone has encountered insects and we'd agree that there are many out there who would happily dispose of them as well. *Centipede* enabled you to happily destroy wave upon wave of insects without ever feeling guilty. Fleas would tear down the screen, leaving a trail of mushrooms in their wake, scorpions moved vertically across the screen, a spider would constantly harass you with an erratic, hard to predict movement pattern, while the multi-segmented centipede would move ever downwards, ready to punish you if you became too complacent. A grasshopper was also planned but never reached the final game. "I drew a grasshopper that shows up in the test mode,' confirms Dona, "but I ran out of space for coding it into the 8K program." One revelation Dona does recall about the game is that one of the insects found in the game was originally going to be a completely different one. "When I drew the insect that travels straight down the screen, I intended for it to be called an ant," reveals Dona. "Somehow, early on it was labelled the flea, and I was never able to change its name back to ant, although I've always stuck with ant when referring to it."

Centipede's insect-based theme and slick controls helped make it into another big hit for Atari and it was ported (officially and unofficially) to a variety of home systems that ranged from the Atari 2600 to the Apple II and Commodore 64, with varying degrees of success. Despite the fact that Atari itself made a couple of ports of the game, Dona tells us that she never played them herself and she soon left Atari and also the game industry shortly after *Centipede*'s release. A sequel, *Millipede*, was released the year after *Centipede*, this time being the sole creation of Ed Logg. While it was notable for introducing a large number of new insects, it failed to make the same impact at the original game.

Dona has not worked in the games industry since leaving Atari in 1982, but she remains a supporter of women who move into the male-dominated industry, and was a keynote speaker at 2007's Women In Games International Conference. She currently resides at the University Of Arkansas at Little Rock as the coordinator of online composition. Although she's not worked in the industry for over 20 years, she still has a deep love of *Centipede* and is pleased that it's still enjoyed by so many gamers. "I am so happy that it is remembered", she concludes. "I appreciate every time someone tells me she or he loved it." ★





» [Arcade] Ed Logg worked on *Centipede* with Dona. He would later create the sequel, *Millipede*, on his own.

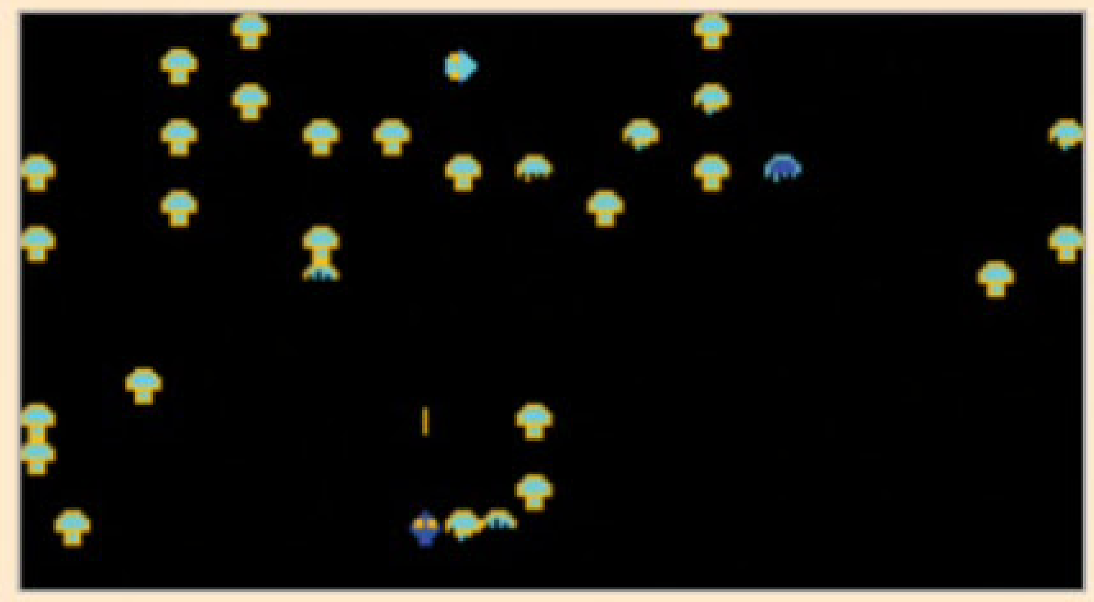
CENTIPEDE PLAYING TIPS

The following pointers should help boost your high scores



DESTROY MUSHROOMS

■ The centipede will drop one level down the playing area whenever it hits the side of the screen or a mushroom. Shoot mushrooms as quickly as you can, but be aware that they can withstand four shoots before disintegrating.



DON'T GET PINNED

■ While you have full manoeuvrability you are confined to the lower fifth of the screen. Make sure you don't get snagged on mushrooms and try and stay clear of the sides of the screen, as you'll have a bigger chance of getting hit by a rogue spider.



TIME YOUR SHOTS

■ Timing is critical in *Centipede*, especially when you're taking down the centipede itself. Time your shots carefully as simply holding down the fire button will mean you'll often miss the final segments as they zip past you.



SCORPION KILLER

■ Make sure you kill the scorpion as soon as you see it. Any mushrooms it poisons will immediately cause the centipede to move downwards immediately if it comes into contact with them. Needless to say, this is not a good thing.



SPIDER SLAYER

■ The spider bounces around the bottom of the screen in a very erratic pattern. You'll get more points if it is shot in the lower part of the screen, but it's easy to get hit. The one good thing is it destroys any mushrooms it touches.



FLEE THE FLEA

■ It's important to kill fleas as they will annoyingly leave mushrooms in their wake. Be careful though as they take two shoots to defeat and the first speeds them up massively, making them extremely dangerous and hard to avoid.



THE REGENERATION GAME

■ While you can try and make sure that you blast mushrooms completely to free up the plane to shoot the titular centipede, any mushrooms that you don't completely remove will be regenerated once your bug zapper is destroyed.



TUNNELS

■ One useful aspect of mushrooms is that they can be used to create tunnels to funnel the centipede in and make it easier to kill. Just be aware that spiders can wreck these, so aim for areas in the middle of the playing area, away from those eight-legged freaks.

BY POST

Send your completed form to:
Retro Gamer Subscriptions, 800 Guillat Avenue, Kent Science Park, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 8GU

EVERY ISSUE PACKED WITH…

- Exclusive content found nowhere else, not even online!
- Incredible developer access
- Nostalgic look backs at classic games and systems
- In-depth features covering 40 years of gaming

WHY YOU SHOULD SUBSCRIBE…

- **Save 50%** off the cover price
- **FREE delivery** direct to your door
- **Never miss an issue**

YOUR DETAILS

Title________________First name________________________________

Surname____

Address____

____

____

Postcode____________________Country______________________

Telephone number____

Mobile number____

Email address____

DELIVERY DETAILS (IF DIFFERENT FROM ABOVE)

Title________________First name________________________________

Surname____

Address____

____

____

Postcode____________________Country______________________

Telephone number____

CREDIT CARD DETAILS

YOUR EXCLUSIVE READER PRICE, 2 YEAR (26 ISSUES)

☐ **UK £51.90 (Save 50%)**

Cheque

☐ I enclose a cheque for £___________________________
(made payable to Imagine Publishing Ltd)

Credit/Debit Card

☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ Amex ☐ Maestro

Card number | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Expiry date | | | | |

Issue number ☐☐ (if Maestro)

Signed ____

Date ____

Please tick if you do not wish to receive any promotional material from Imagine Publishing Ltd by post ☐ by telephone ☐ via email ☐

Please tick if you do not wish to receive any promotional material from other companies by post ☐ by telephone ☐ Please tick if you DO wish to receive such information via email ☐

TERMS & CONDITIONS

This offer entitles new UK credit card subscribers to pay just **£51.90** for **26 issues**, saving **50%**. Offer code **PTF15** must be quoted to receive this special subscription price. Subscriptions will start with the next available issue. Details of the Direct Debit Guarantee are available on request. This offer expires **30 June 2015**. Overseas rates available at **www.imaginesubs.co.uk**



ORDER BY

30 JUNE 2015

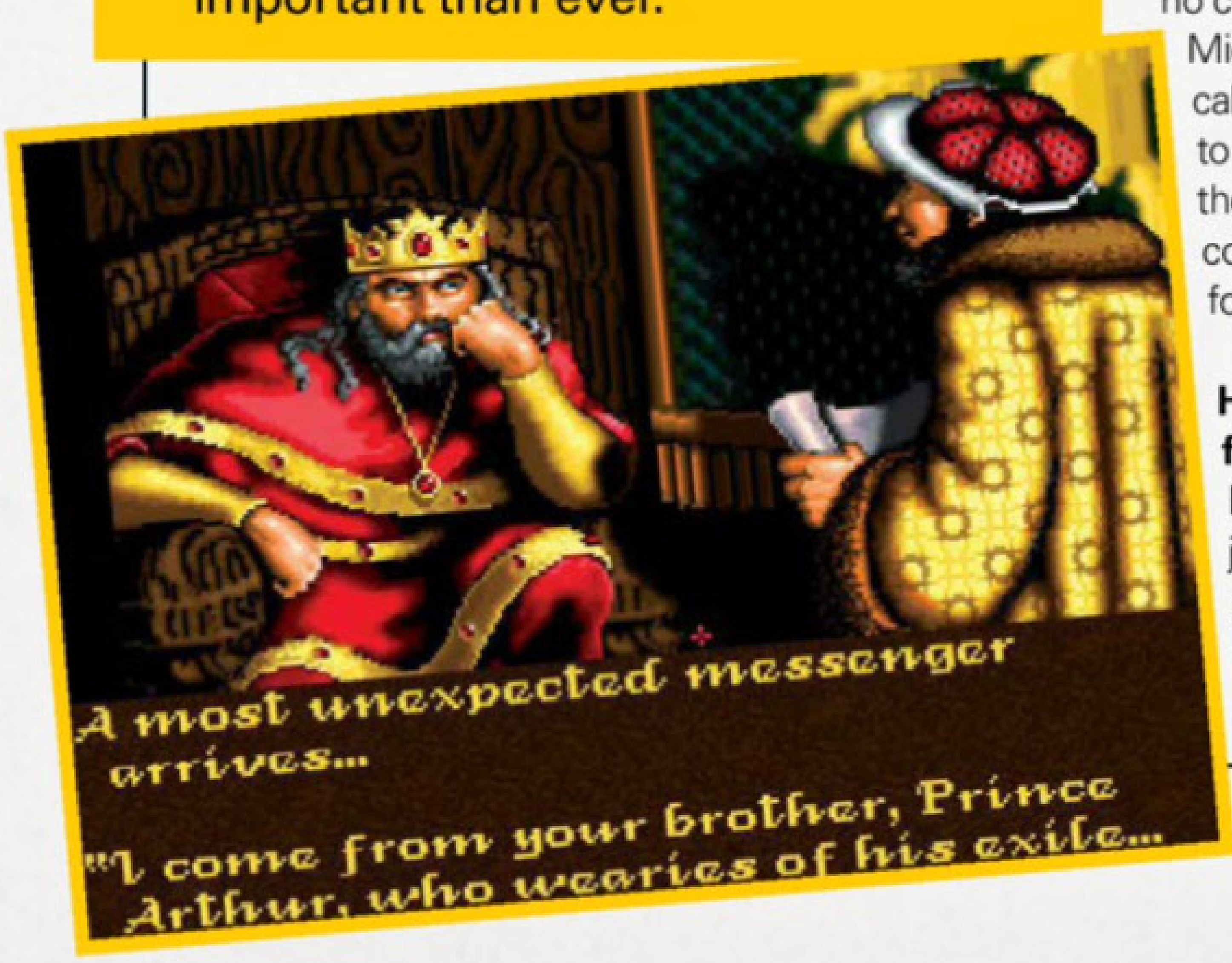
Use code **PTF15** for this offer.

In the chair with...

BRIAN FARGO

If you love western RPGs then Brian's work will be instantly familiar to you, as he's been involved in some of the seminal titles from the past 30 years. Here he tells Adam Barnes how his love affair with the videogames industry first began

In recent times, the name Brian Fargo has become synonymous with crowdfunding, and after the huge success of his Kickstarter project for *Wasteland 2*, it's easy to see why he'd become such an ardent advocate for this new age of development. But to retro gamers he's played a much more important role; whether it's many of the early Apple II RPGs he developed, or the large number of games that were published through his company, Interplay. Through his industry knowledge he helped usher big names such as Blizzard and BioWare into the industry. It is true that his career has been fraught with lows as much as highs, but with Brian's second company, inXile Entertainment, now finding great success on classic gaming concepts and games, he's helping to prove that our retro heritage is now more important than ever.



Hi Brian. So firstly, how did you originally get into the videogame industry and what was it that spurred your interest in developing games?

My first memories of development was the desire to know how it was done with none of the knowledge. I owned a Magnavox Odyssey and an Atari VCS but there was no written material that I could find that explained the magic of how they made the screen come to life. My first glimpse of how it all worked was when my parents, thankfully, bought me an Apple II computer in 1979. I remember at one point I managed to get hold of someone at Activision to find out what kind of processor was inside since the only one I knew was the 6502. They certainly set me to understand how difficult the business was going to be when their answer was, 'if you don't know what's inside now, you will never know.' Yikes.

So what was it like working on your first game?

The first game that I ever created was with my high school friend, Michael Cranford. We played a *lot* of *Dungeons & Dragons* in our high school years and we were both drawn towards the technology. It's funny to think that back then we had to sneak into the computer lab after school because there were no computer classes, and now they are required… Michael and I made our first game in high school called *The Labyrinth Of Martagon* and sold it only to the local stores. I don't normally count this as the first published game since we probably sold 12 copies. My first real effort would come later in the form of an adventure game, *The Demon's Forge*.

How did developing *The Demon's Forge* differ from your earlier projects?

My words of advice to any new developer is to just finish a game, anything, just go through the entire process so you can understand it. *The Demon's Forge*, for the Apple II, was a great learning step as I had to write the code, debug it, run an ad, buy artwork, contract out a programming task and duplicate the disks myself. This introduced me to lots of other people in the area with similar interests, which became critical for my success. The biggest lesson was learning that there were programmers a whole lot better than me, which pushed me towards the producing route where I could set a vision and get everyone working towards it.

It wasn't long before you formed Interplay; what was it that convinced you that this was the industry that you wanted to be involved with?

I knew I wanted to be involved with programming and technology, though the concept of making a living from games was beyond my expectations. The PC games business represented the culmination of every single interest I had. Looking back it seems I was primed for doing this. It's nice to be in a profession that mentally stimulates you.

A lot of your earlier games followed similar gameplay styles – mostly adventure games. What was it that drew you to this type of game?

Although I have put plenty of time into action games, I gravitated towards storytelling because it appealed to my sensibilities and I could see ways that I could improve upon it. People often ask me why after 30 years I am still doing this and being able to push the medium motivates me more than anything else. With every game I finish I see an opportunity on how to expand and deepen the experience. My experiences alone help me to offer a slant on concepts that I could not have made happen 20 years ago.

What did working at Interplay teach you in those early days in your career?

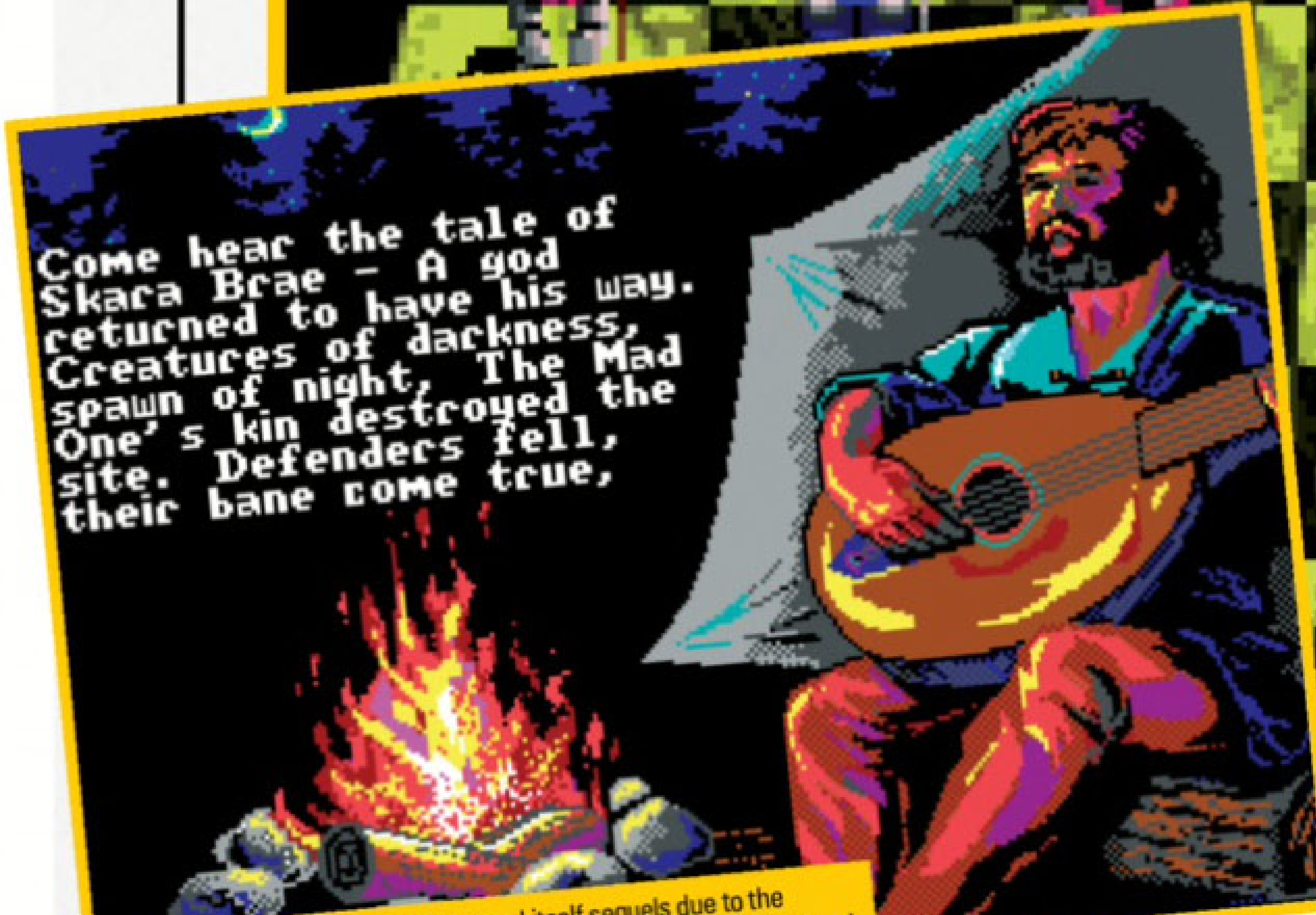
Creating a healthy environment and strong vision for a game are the critical factors for success. I've



“I knew I wanted to be involved with programming and technology, though the concept of making a living from games was beyond my expectations”
Brian Fargo



» [DOS] Considering its simple idea, *Battle Chess* was surprisingly prevalent across home computers at the time. It was so popular, an enhanced version was released on CD.



» [DOS] *The Bard's Tale* quickly earned itself sequels due to the original's success, giving Interplay the opportunity to grow and expand.

worked with different teams my entire career and all of the games become bigger than me. My role is to get it on the right track with a smart team that locks in on it. The more in tune they become with the vision, the less I have to do. My biggest contribution when things are snapping along is to stay tuned to the sensibilities and make sure we are hitting the right notes and avoiding any bad decisions that could undermine the entire effort. It only takes one big bad judgment call to gut years of work. As an example, at one point there was discussion about dropping internet support for *Descent* but I knew that was a critical part of the game and insisted it stay.

Home computer architecture at the time was fairly limited – did this affect development of any of your games at all?
I don't remember the hardware being the limiting factor at that time but rather the medium's storage capabilities. Our goal was to bring the music, sound and art production values up and that takes disk space. Keep in mind that this was during a time that we had to put *Wasteland* text into a paragraph book due to limited space. I remember one publisher laughing us out of the room when I informed them that *Bard's Tale* would require two whole floppy discs. They said they'd circle back when Steve Jobs put a cartridge port on the back of the Apple II.

***Bard's Tale* was a big title for Interplay, what was it about the game that drove you to make more?**
Bard's Tale was my first number one hit and really put both me and Interplay on the map. It was a real turning point for the company as it generated a royalty stream that took the pressure off the 'work for hire' financials we had been under. We finally had extra money to better polish our games and finance small efforts. D&D was a major influence on me so this series was always close to my heart. Maintaining it meant understanding the creation and improving upon each version.

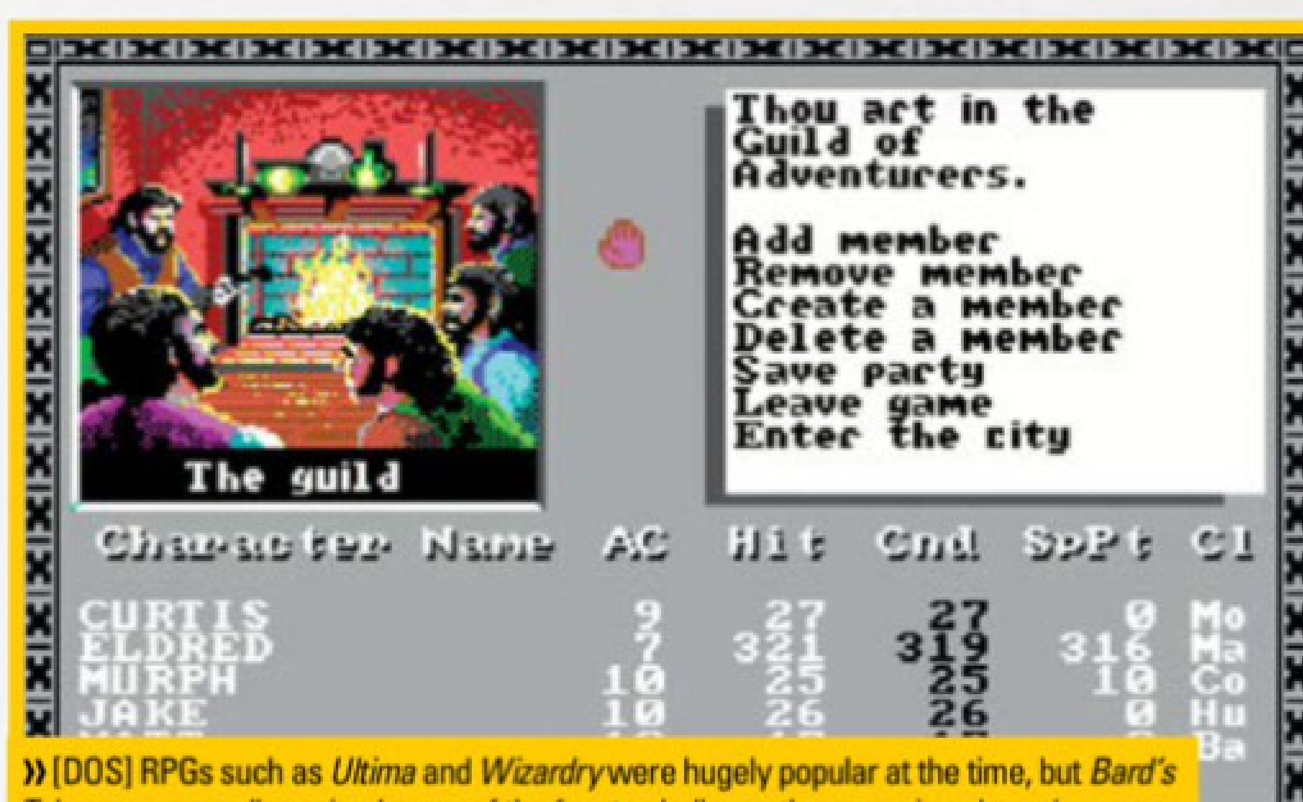
What was it like working with EA and Activision back in the early days of the industry?
I find that publishers became a bit neurotic once the budgets started to cost more than 10 million dollars. One big mistake could ruin a career or tank a company so it became hard for a developer to be fully trusted. We had far less micromanagement back then and games didn't have the pressure on a summer blockbuster release. At one point back in the late Eighties I was one of the few developers doing work with both Activision and EA at the time and they had an extremely hostile relationship with each other. I used to get grilled by both sides about what the other was up to and there were times they didn't want to invite me to certain events for fear I would share their plans. It was like being a child of divorced parents.

SELECTED TIMELINE

GAMES

- **Demon's Forge** [Apple II] 1981
- **Tales of the Unknown: Volume I – The Bard's Tale** [Apple II] 1985
- **The Bard's Tale II: The Destiny Knight** [Apple II] 1986
- **Tass Times in Tonetown** [Apple II] 1986
- **Wanderer** [C64] 1988
- **The Bard's Tale III: Thief of Fate** [Apple II] 1988
- **Battle Chess** [Amiga] 1988
- **Wasteland** [C64] 1988
- **Neuromancer** [Amiga] 1989
- **Total Recall** [NES] 1990
- **The Bard's Tale** [PS2] 2004
- **Hunted: The Demon's Forge** [Xbox 360] 2011
- **Wasteland 2** [PC] 2014
- **Torment: Tides Of Numenera** [PC] TBA 2015

What made you decide to move Interplay more into publishing instead of development?
My career has come full circle in so many ways. The difficulty in the Eighties was that most of the games were being made by teams of only one to four people and having a hit meant you could profit. I wanted to build a real business with a mid-size teams of specialists, have a medical plan, a place to rent and someone to answer the phones. Despite having a



» [DOS] RPGs such as *Ultima* and *Wizardry* were hugely popular at the time, but *Bard's Tale* was very well received – one of the few to challenge the crowning champions.

FIVE TO PLAY

The most important games of Brian Fargo's impressive career

TALES OF THE UNKNOWN: VOLUME 1 – THE BARD'S TALE [APPLE II] 1985

■ *The Bard's Tale* – as it is more commonly known – was a big success for Interplay. It was very well received – challenging the likes of *Ultima* and *Wizardry* in terms of gameplay and popularity, and was particularly praised for its graphics.





BATTLE CHESS [AMIGA] 1988

■ Though it's just a recreation of the most famous strategy game ever designed, this was surprisingly prevalent across a large number of platforms. It was novel to many to have the varying pieces on the board battle for victory, and its detailed graphics made it stand out much more.

WASTELAND [C64] 1988

■ The forebear of the likes of *Fallout*, the post-apocalyptic setting of *Wasteland* was a contrast to the fantasy RPGs that had been popular at the time. It stood out from the few similar games at the time for dealing with moral ambiguity, as well as bringing puzzle solving into the equation alongside the combat, story and exploration.





THE BARD'S TALE [PS2] 2004

■ After forming inXile Entertainment, it was novel that Brian should find success with *The Bard's Tale* again. This time it was more typical of console games, and brought with it a sense of humour. It didn't garner huge success at the time, but did find a new audience with the rise of mobile gaming.

WASTELAND 2 [PC] 2014

■ As something of a poster child for videogames on Kickstarter there was a lot of pressure on *Wasteland 2* to succeed *and* appease the fans. A string of delays gave backers concern, but were pleased on its release to find an RPG well worth playing and the first in a long time to make proper use of a post-apocalyptic setting.



series of number one hit games, we weren't making much money. I had no choice but to change my business model. This pushed us towards publishing in which we financed our own game and paid for the cost of goods. Our first game was *Battle Chess* which thankfully became a number one hit. Had that failed… it would have been the end of Interplay.

Was there a change in mindset when you decided to publish your own – and later on other developer's – games?

I think it first started with needing outside contractors to help port our games onto other formats for which we didn't have the in-house expertise or resources. Stage 2 involved us having game concepts that we were anxious to do yet not enough programmers to code. *Castles* was the first example of us having an internal game idea and contracting it out, to Quicksilver Software, for implementation. We followed that same business model shortly thereafter with Silicon & Synapse (now Blizzard) for a SNES game called *RPM Racing*. Some of the same developers we were already in business with started to pitch to us, which led to games like *Lexi-Cross* and *The Lost Vikings*. Additionally I used to attend the European trade shows each year scouring for games that I thought would be successful in the US. I was able to negotiate for such gems as *Out Of This World* and *Alone In The Dark*. As our name grew we started to have outside teams pitch us their own concepts with some of these early efforts producing *Clayfighter* and *Descent*.

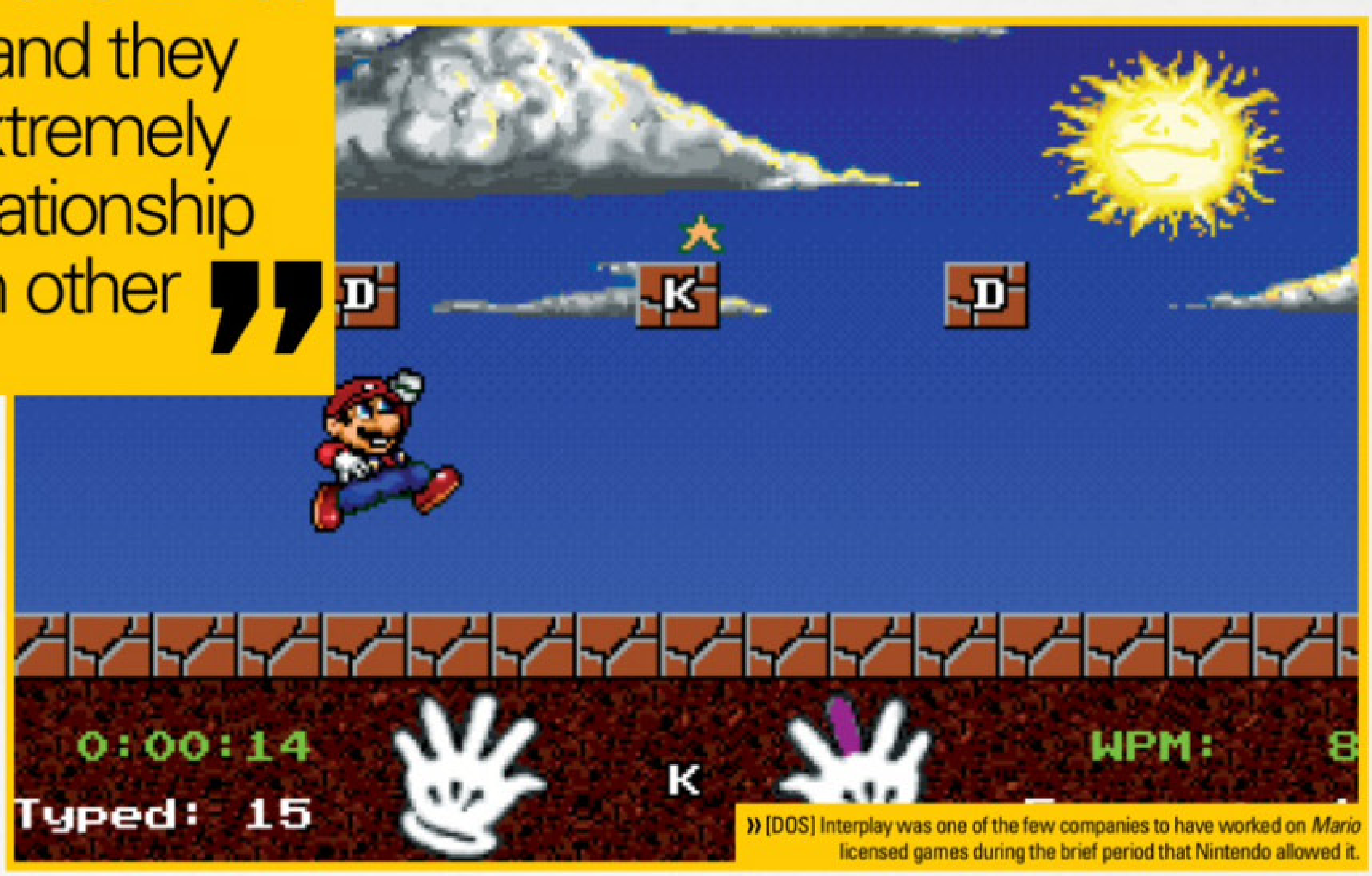
> "I was one of the few developers doing work with both Activision and EA at the time and they had an extremely hostile relationship with each other"
> Brian Fargo

You were one of the few companies to have worked on a Mario game outside of Nintendo's first-party studios; how did this come about, and what was the process like?

I kept seeing *Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing* in the top charts year after year and I knew that a large portion of the sales were from parents buying it for their kids. Well it sure seemed a lot more exciting to learn typing from Mario than from a teacher. Our VP, Dick Lehrberg, had a great relationship with Nintendo and helped us secure the rights to that little plumber. It was a huge success for us, such that I wanted to expand into other educational games with Nintendo. Unfortunately some shoddy licensed *Mario* products started to come about and Miyamoto put a stop to all of that.

How did you come to meet Allen Adham and Michael Morhaime of Silicon & Synapse? Did you have much impact on some of their early games?

I mostly knew Allen (used to be Ayman) Adham when he was in high school. We used to share all of our game knowledge and we'd try to stay on top of every single Apple II game that ever game out. I can proudly say I had the high score in *Computer Gaming World* for *Swashbuckler* back in the day. Allen went into the military after high school and when he circled back he told me that he wanted to create a company like Interplay. I gave them their first shot with a series of games to get them going. They were always



» [DOS] Interplay was one of the few companies to have worked on *Mario* licensed games during the brief period that Nintendo allowed it.

a pleasure to work with as they showed great integrity and passion. I was always quite involved with pushing the quality and concepts of the game I did with them. I bet I put more hours into *Rock N' Roll Racing* than most people.

You did become known for finding and working with talented developers early on in their careers – from the Blizzard guys, to BioWare and Parallax Software. How were you able to spot these developers, what was it that stood out?
I've had the good fortune of working with some of the most intelligent and hardworking people in the business and you start to see patterns with people. There was no one feature about them but just an overall feeling and I was able to see their work effort. All of these groups had talent, an understanding of the marketplace, and extreme drive.

How did it feel once you had built Interplay up into the company you'd dreamed it to be? Were there any unexpected challenges?
Ah, to do it all over again. We never had a lack of game concepts that we wanted to see and our good relationships had more fantastic ideas coming in. I'm proud of the great games we released in the Nineties but clearly we had taken on too much and never made the console transition. We grew too large for the PC market alone to support us. The biggest challenges were communication and having enough funds to get us through our mistakes and the skyrocketing development costs.

When did you get a sense that the company was first beginning to struggle?
The ultimate downfall was our lack of focus as I mentioned earlier. We should have kept focus on our vision: 'By Gamers, For Gamers'. Instead we were lured away by success and the desire to grow the company into more diverse incomes. MCA/Universal came in around 1995 with a 10 million dollar investment and an edict to grow. That was a lot of money for about two seconds and then development budgets and marketing spends ballooned into the millions. It was around 1997 when things really started to hit the wall. It was as if each initiative blew up simultaneously, the PC business was falling to console and our console strategy with Shiny was not producing a hit. I could list off the specifics in each area but for me it always comes back to focus. Towards that end I wanted to restart the company with an RPG focus but I had too many shareholders with different ideas and agendas.

How did you feel having Titus Software as a majority shareholder? How did it want to exact its control over the company?
At one point we had nearly 50 million dollars of debt with the massive product returns and investments into games. I would wake in cold sweats at night knowing that I had to find a solution to save the company and get this debt off our books. It didn't help that we were incurring an additional 1 million dollars per month in interest alone. I ended up launching an IPO which erased only half the debt. I brought Titus in to remove a large piece of what remained and also struck a deal with Microsoft with the *Matrix* licence. I was simultaneously working on a sale of Interplay to a Chinese company and one more money raising deal so that I could finally be debt free for the first time in years. Unfortunately, Titus had very different ideas about how to run a business and we were butting heads. The Chinese deal fell apart due to demands from Titus and additionally they thought they could raise money on more favourable terms than what I was working on. They started to make overtures of a hostile takeover at which point I just flipped them the keys (and probably the bird too) and told them to have at it. I was burned out from managing debt and lawyers for years and yearned badly to get back to game making. It was a sad moment but I knew my health would be at risk if I battled much longer.

> "Engage! was a personal baby of mine and in some ways it was ahead of its time and in others it was too late" Brian Fargo

Could you tell us more about Engage! and what it was that the company did?
Engage! was a personal baby of mine and in some ways it was ahead of its time and in others it was too late. Keep in mind that this was 1996 and the commercial internet was in its infancy. There were a number of different portals through which people were playing online games back then. We had AOL, ImagiNation Network, Prodigy



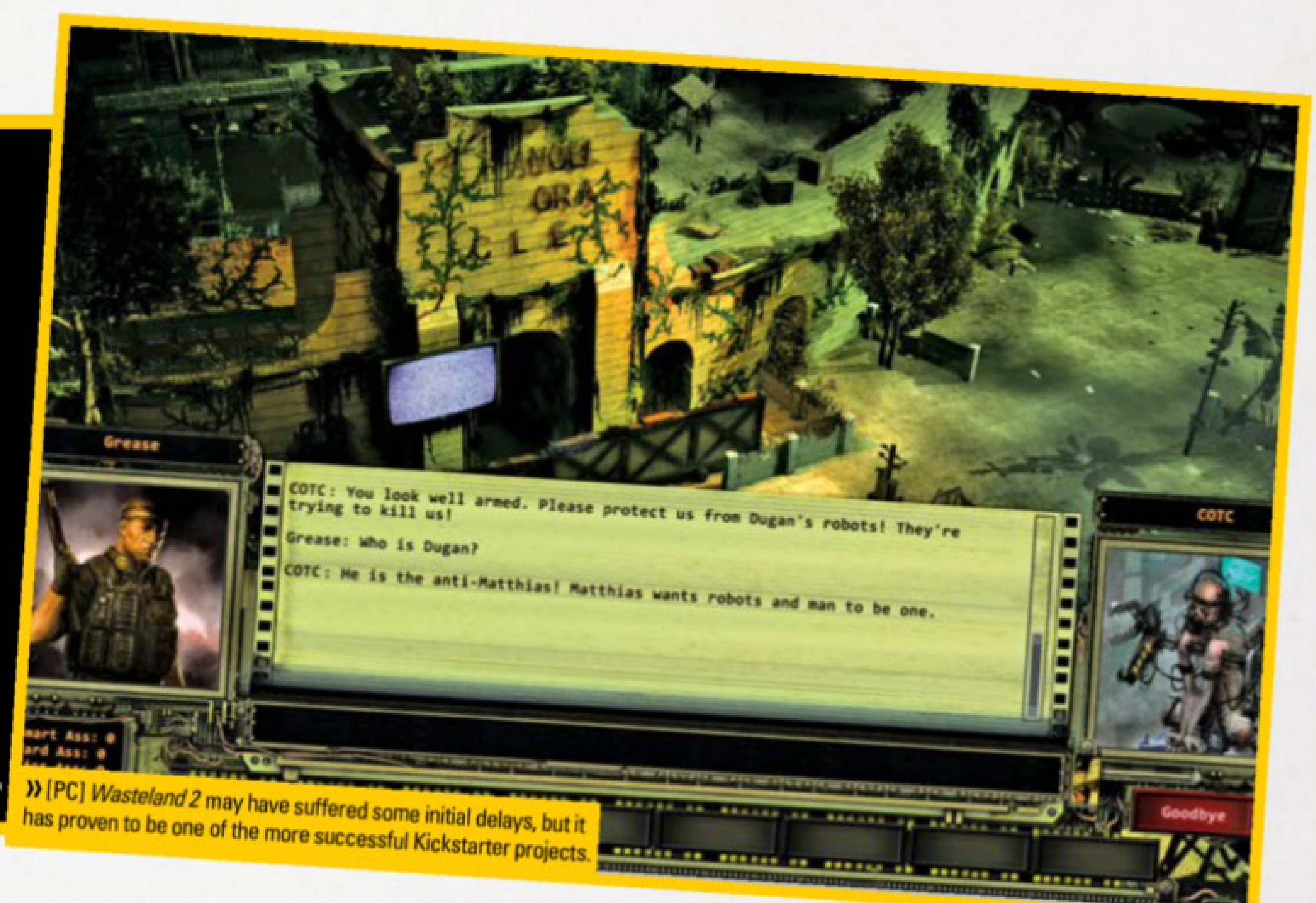
» [DOS] *Neuromancer* was based on the William Gibson novel of the same name, offering a cool *Blade Runner*-style setting.



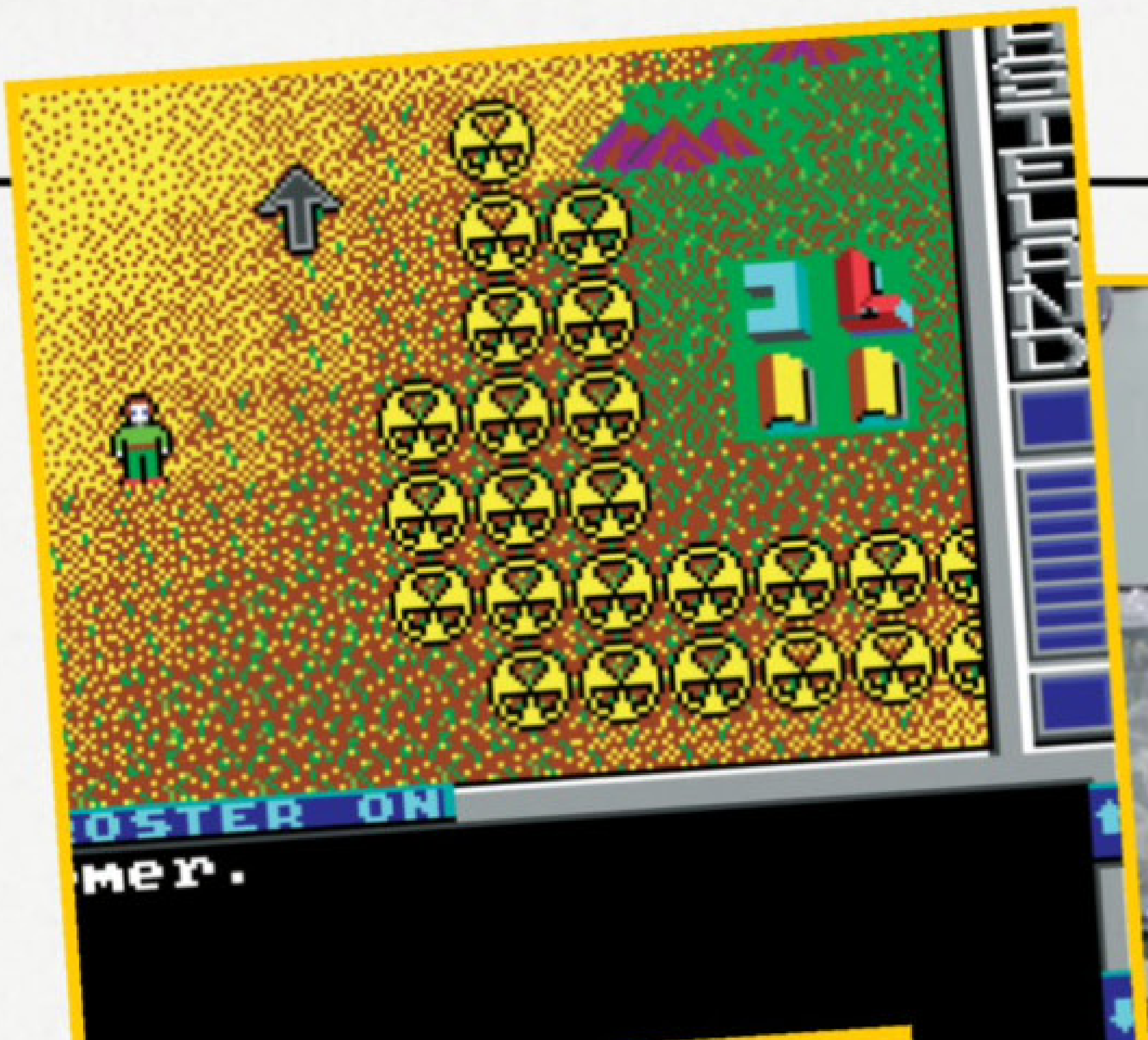
» [DOS] Blizzard – then known as Silicon & Synapse – were given its break thanks to Brian and Interplay with many of its early games published by the company.



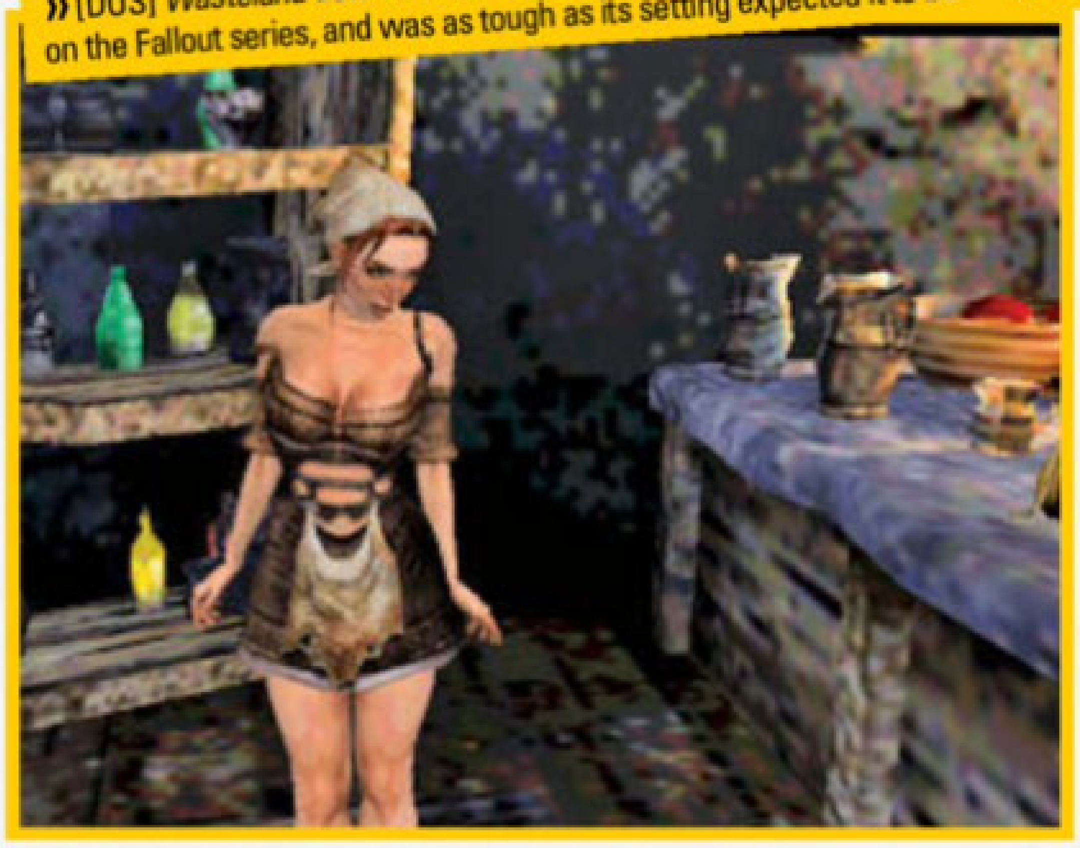
» [DOS] Though *Demon's Forge* wasn't Brian's first game, it gave him the experience in every aspect of game development – from coding to marketing.



» [PC] *Wasteland 2* may have suffered some initial delays, but it has proven to be one of the more successful Kickstarter projects.



» [DOS] *Wasteland* acted as a predecessor for Interplay's future efforts on the Fallout series, and was as tough as its setting expected it to be.





and this new thing called the internet which all had different mechanisms for delivering content. My idea was that we create a hub so that developers could write games to just one API and we could make it launch on simultaneously across all of the networks. I then signed up the rights to *D&D*, *Warcraft*, a game from Mythic, and we also had some Maxis rights. Later Softbank came in as a investor to infuse it with cash and offer an Asian connection. AOL switched to a monthly fee which gutted our *D&D* royalty stream and then bought the Imagination Network who then became a middle man between us and AOL. With revenues from AOL disappearing and the direct internet too immature, the timing of Engage! was off.

What was your immediate plan after Interplay?

After the drama of those last few years I was in need of some time out of the pressure. It was a nice break to be able to sit back and just play games and reconnect with my friends in the business. But I only needed about 90 days before I was ready to jump back in. I started to make calls to my various contacts and it was clear that any kind of PC funding would be hard to come by, which moved us towards thinking about consoles. The other thing that struck me was how bad the tropes were of RPGs and how I found myself killing rats in the sewer for 20 odd years. With those things in mind I wanted to parody RPG elements and we were keen on the *Dark Alliance* engine that Snowblind had created. We were in no position to create new technology so we licensed that engine and struck a deal with Vivendi for America and Acclaim for Europe for our *Bard's Tale* comedy.



» Brain proudly poses in front of some of the many games he has been involved with.

What was the process of founding inXile like, and what did you want from the company?

One of the things that I used to stress to developers was to use the same diligence in creating a company that they did in designing a game. To focus on the tenets of what's important and the type of person they wanted to have work in the company. I was fortunate that I had a long time working experience with my crew: Matt Findley, John Alvarado and Maxx Kauffman. But beyond that, I wanted to get back into development, back to the very reason I wanted to be the games business to begin with. In fact it took some adjustment to get used to the idea that working on games all day was actually my job now.

Nowadays, obviously, inXile is free of publishing whims. In what ways has the experience of Kickstarter and popularity in indie development freed developers like yourself?

I'd rather live and die by my decisions than be dictated as to what is important. For example in filmmaking, every director has his/her own style of approaching a film and who's to say that Scorecese's approach is better than Spielberg's? I have a certain way of creating that is unique to my style and I'm free to explore creativity in a more organic fashion when I am not chasing money to get paid. Publisher contracts normally are rigid for how the elements need to unfold and we'd find ourselves doing things in the wrong order to get money to make payroll. When I was at Interplay I would sometimes get pressure from finance not to pay a developer who missed a milestone and I would remind them that we should either kill the game or pay them. We could not pretend that we weren't making their payroll and we wanted them motivated to do what they did best. If we lost faith in their ability to deliver then we would kill it but otherwise let's keep the trust.



» [PS2] The updated *Bard's Tale* was a very different game to the original.

What's your dream for inXile now in this new era of indie development?

I just want to keep doing what we're doing. It's gratifying to be artistic and create these worlds for people to enjoy. To start with a blank piece of paper and turn that into a final creation like a *Torment* or *Wasteland 2* is the ultimate challenge to me and hearing comments back from our audience is the best. RPGs allow me to escape into another world. There is laods more I want to do in this area and it's great to be able to focus on my favourite genre.

Lastly, as a sort of send off, what would you say is your fondest memory in game development?

My best memories are from the people I've worked with and hearing back from our audience. If I had to pick one memory I would say that it was the success of the *Wasteland 2* campaign. It was a recognition of my work and it showed that people who played my games over the years trusted me.



Time Bandit

"IS IT ALWAYS LIKE THIS AFTER YOU'VE DONE A RAID?"

» RETROREVIVAL

» ATARI ST
» BILL DUNLEVY & HARRY LAFNEAR
» 1985

It's always fun to see a throwback to an old game in something new. I laughed out loud the first time I saw Pitfall Harry's Atari 2600 sprite clashing with his 16-bit surroundings in *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure*, and the game of *Galaxian* on the *Ridge Racer* loading screen is still one of my favourite moments of developer ingenuity. *Time Bandit* was doing this a long time before it was cool, though – the top-down shooter was pilfering bits from other games when videogames barely had any history to speak of, including such throwbacks as a *Pac-Man* level.

Of course, that's just one reason to like *Time Bandits*, and there's actually quite a few of them as it's one of the strongest early releases for the 16-bit computers. Running around the various historically-themed stages trying to snag valuable items is a lot of fun, as is blasting the endlessly respawning enemies.

Amusingly enough, *Time Bandits* also comes across as being an anachronism. Few games released in 1985 look quite as good as this does, and it comes across as a take-off of *Gauntlet*: surprisingly heavily despite being released at a similar time as the arcade original, and originating earlier on the TRS-80 and other 8-bit machines. So here's a game which lives up to the time travel theme in many more ways than one, both forwards and backwards looking – what a strange game *Time Bandits* is… *


TIME BANDIT
© 1985 MichTron
PROGRAMMING:
Bill Dunlevy
GRAPHICS:
Harry Lafnear
CUBITS: 2270
AVERAGE (20

RETRORATED



>> It's taken its sweet time to arrive, but the wait for 3D Out Run has certainly been worth it. We also go score attack crazy in OlliOlli2 and play though Resident Evil: Revelations 2



» [3DS] Okay so it's not a Testarossa anymore, but there's no denying it's the same old *Out Run*.

3D Out Run

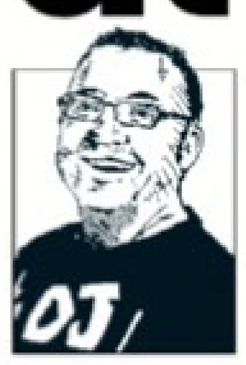
SEGA'S CLASSIC RACER GETS A 3D MAKEOVER

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** 3DS
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £4.49
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** M2
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *Out Run* was created by Yu Suzuki in 1986 and used super scaler technology. It became a huge success for Sega, leading to several sequels, including *Turbo OutRun* and *OutRunners*. Interestingly, Sega wouldn't release an official sequel until OutRun 2 in 2003.



***Out Run* remains one of Sega's most cherished franchises.** First released in 1986, it immediately thrilled arcade goers due to its stunning visuals, delightful soundtrack and challenging gameplay. Considering the high respect the original game commands, it should come as no surprise to learn that emulation maestros, M2, are the coders behind this latest port. It should also come as no surprise to learn that the developer has done everything it can to ensure that *Out Run* remains as enjoyable now as it was some 30 years ago.

The first thing you'll notice when playing *3D Out Run* is just how smooth the damned thing is. Unlike the original arcade game, *3D Out Run* runs at a super slick 60fps. It makes a huge difference to the way the game plays and also looks absolutely fantastic. It's helped further by yet another stunning 3D effect. We're the first to admit that we can happily play most 3DS games with the 3D turned off, but when it is handled as well as it is in *3D Out Run*, you can't help but switch it on.

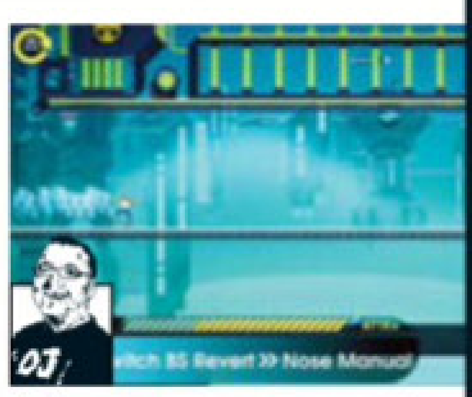
Out Run always offered a wonderful 3D-style effect due to the clever technology Yu Suzuki and his team used which created a dynamic, undulating track, which would rise and fall at a moments notice. It is so much more obvious here, though, and it feels like you are really racing through tunnels or screaming past windmills at 180mph. Like *After Burner II*, it is easily one of the best 3D conversions that M2 has pulled off, which is fitting when you consider the heritage of the original *Out Run*.

It's not just clever 3D that makes this new *Out Run* feel refreshingly relevant; M2 has also added a variety of new gameplay mechanics, which further change the game. Completing courses (not easy unless you cheat and raise the

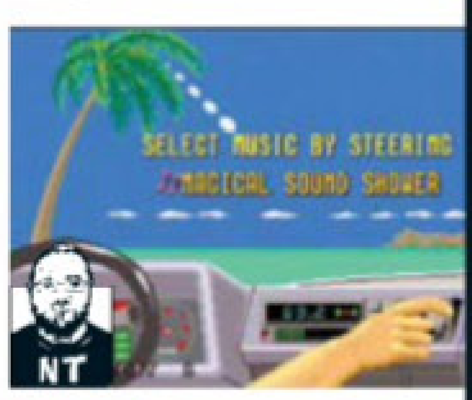
» [3DS] The emulation really is superb and can even put you in the deluxe cabinet.



✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
OlliOlli2: Welcome To Olliwood
I'm locked in a vicious score battle with **Play** magazine's Paul Walker-Emig. It's awesome fun.



NICK
3D Out Run
M2's portwork continues to impress but it has really pushed the boat out with *3D Out Run*. It is an incredible achievement.

Out Run forever More awesome Out Run games



Turbo OutRun

The biggest difference with Sega's second *Out Run* game was the turbo boost that increased your speed in short bursts. This was handy when the police would show up, prompting you to avoid them. *Turbo OutRun* also doesn't feature junctions, meaning it played like an arcade racer.



OutRunners

By far the best thing about *OutRunners* was the ability to race against seven other players. *OutRunners* is also notable for being the first game in the series that let you choose from a selection of vehicles before each race. Stay away from the Mega Drive port, as it's pretty damn poor .



OutRun 2019

This futuristic take is a nice addition to the series that never seems to get enough love. As well as introducing jumps, bridges and alternate routes, it also let you race on raised sections of the track. While it's a little drab for an *Out Run* game it is still worth tracking down.



OutRun 2

This stunning effort from 2003 remains one of the best racers we've ever played and is highly recommended. While its drifting mechanics greatly changed the core *Out Run* gameplay, it's the fun Heart Attack mode and stunning soundtrack that makes it so enjoyable to return to.



OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast

After the superb Xbox port of *OutRun 2,* Sumo delivered a sequel that introduced the SP arcade tracks and a completely brand new game mode entitled *Coast 2 Coast*. It may well be a port, but the new enhancements make it feel like its own game.



» [3DS] Different coloured Ferraris represent the various car modifications you can turn on and off.

★WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
RIDGE RACER (PLAYSTATION)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
SEGA RALLY REVO (PS3)



timer) now unlocks new abilities (and colours) for your Ferrari Testarossa. The biggest difference is handling, which greatly affects how your car takes some of the tighter corners in the game. There are also modifications that reduce the impact of hitting other cars, boost your overall top speed to over 200mph, or stop you from losing speed if you graze a corner or veer offroad. You can play with all or some of these enhancements switched on and the colour of your car will change accordingly.

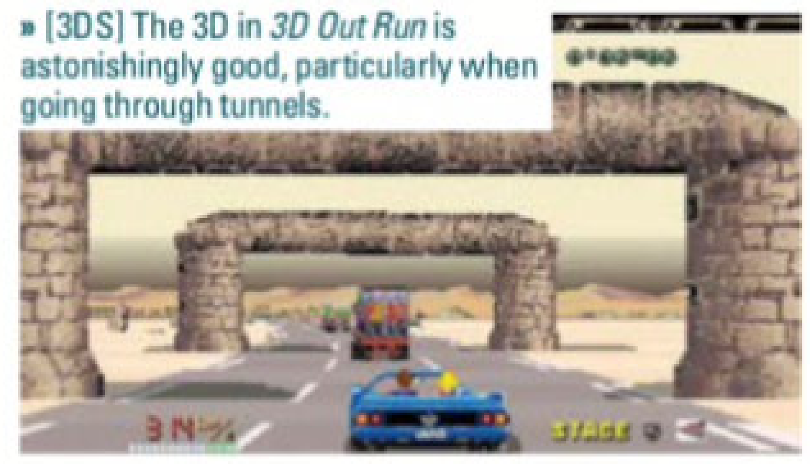
In addition to unlocking all these game-changing extras, M2 has included another treat – the original arcade version of the game. While it's lovely to see, it does prove to highlight how important high frame-rates can be, as it feels a little sluggish on the speed and handling fronts compared to M2's superb update. It's a lovely touch to have all the same, even if you're no longer playing as an actual Ferrari (the licence has once again been lost, meaning the car and the famous badge have been subtly changed).

Another welcome addition to *3D Out Run* is the inclusion of two brand new music tracks: Cruising Line and Camino A Mi Amor. While Crusing Line is arguably the better track thanks to a punchier set up and some lovely sweet riffs, both tracks work extremely well and they feel like hidden treasures from the *Out Run* Archives.

As this is a M2 port, *3D Out Run* also includes a huge number of excellent tweaks that can be played around with to your heart's content. You can change the difficulty level, the amount of time and even the size of the screen so that you can see the original decals and steering wheel. It's also possible to emulate the moving of the sit down arcade cabinet, which becomes even more effective when in 3D. Engine volume can be adjusted, the equalizer can be fiddled with, and you're able to change the enviro SFX. Pretty much every element of the game can be adjusted to how you like it.

M2 has even included both versions of the original arcade game so that you can choose between the original Japanese track layouts (which make for a harder race) and the later international versions. There may well be a kitchen sink hidden in the code somewhere as well, so comprehensive is M2's port.

If we had any complaints about *3D Out Run,* we'd question the decision to not include online leaderboards, but other than that there's really very little to moan about. You soon forget that the car isn't a true Testarossa, and once you're dodging traffic and marveling at the superb music you'll feel like you're back in the Eighties. If you never liked the original you'll find nothing to change your mind here, but anyone else will discover this to be a stunning port that makes this easily the best version of the game to ever appear outside of the arcades. Download it immediately. ★

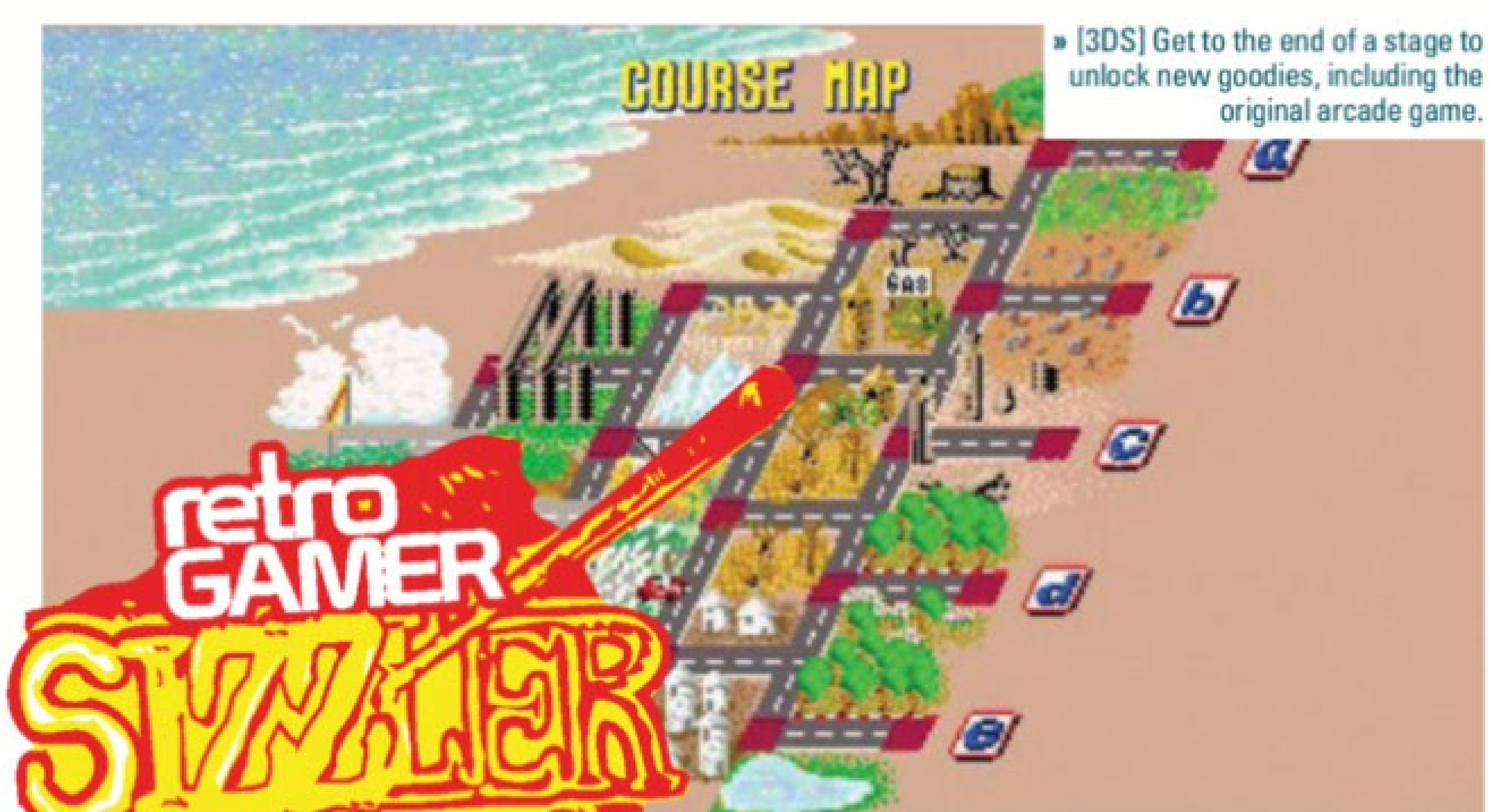


» [3DS] The 3D in *3D Out Run* is astonishingly good, particularly when going through tunnels.

In a nutshell

A classic game gets enhanced in every possible way to deliver the definitive version. Make no mistake, you need *3D Out Run* in your life.

>> Score 92%



» [3DS] Get to the end of a stage to unlock new goodies, including the original arcade game.

retro GAMER SIZZLER

RETROROUND-UP

>> Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download

✱PICK OF THE MONTH

OlliOlli2: Welcome To Olliwood

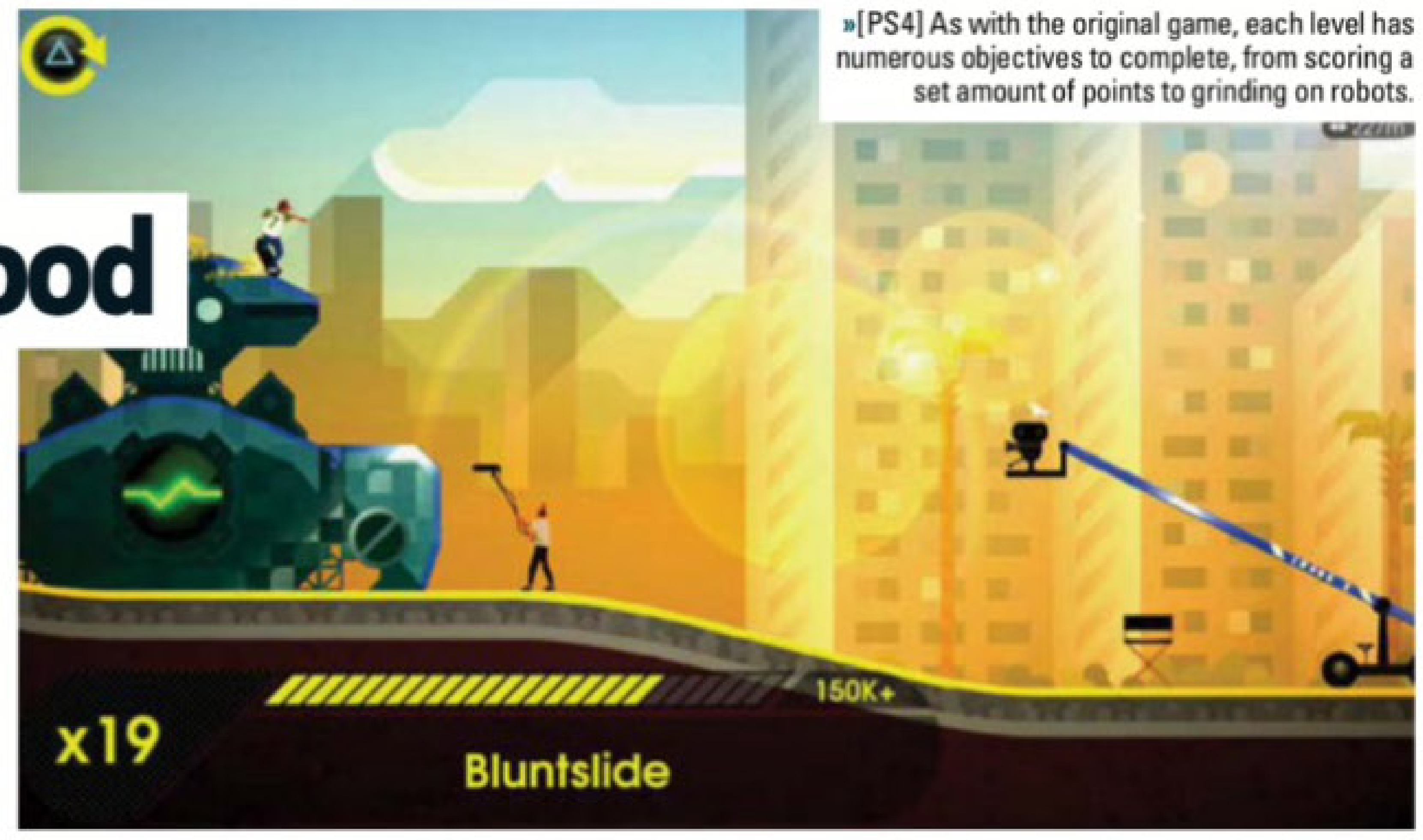
» **System:** PS Vita (tested) PS4 » **Cost:** £9.99 » **Buy it from:** PSN

When you find yourself locked in a savage leaderboard battle with a member of Play magazine you know you're playing a really good game. *OlliOlli2: Welcome To Olliwood* doesn't add many new features to the mix, but what it does add dramatically affects how the game is played. As with *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2*, *OlliOlli2* is more a case of bigger, better, faster, more. There are more tricks to learn, more impressive levels to tackle and more focus on intense high score battles. These high score chases are mainly due to the introduction of the manual, a seemingly innocuous little move that enables you to string moves together to create even more impressive combos. There are also grind switches and reverts to master, which further help to boost your scores.

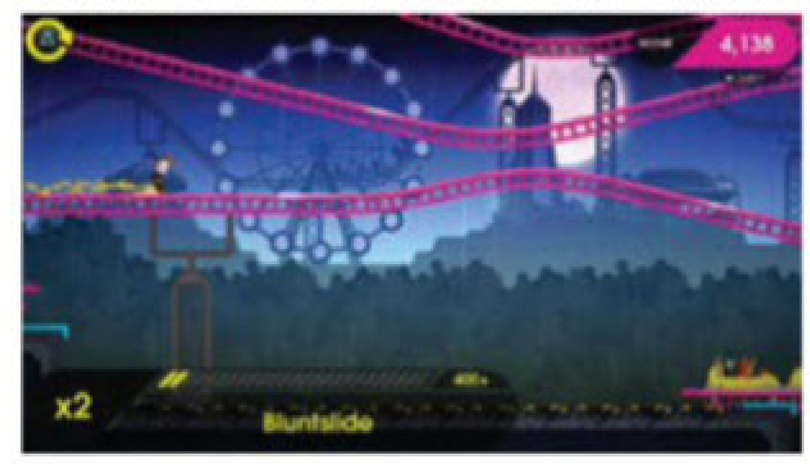
The addition of these new moves works exceptionally well, so well in fact that for ages we made no real progress in the game, being content to simply replay the first five stages ad infinitum. The clever layout of the earlier stages allow you to pull off some insane combos that just wouldn't have been possible in the original *OlliOlli*, leaving you to chase scores to your heart's content. The leaderboards feel far more stable than those of its predecessor, while the background clutter is far less obtrusive, allowing you to concentrate on creating awesome runs, before you eventually tackle the inevitable Pro Mode.

It's important to highlight that Roll7's super slick sequel isn't perfect, mind. The last world is a painful experience to battle through, turning the game into an annoyingly unfun platformer that requires far too much of the player in order to make progress. Pretty much every level run requires you to hit perfect grinds and manuals so you can maintain the speeds needed to hit some of the insane jumps, which just doesn't make it very fun and it greatly diminishes the game's enjoyment as a result. There's no multiplayer mode at present (although this will apparently get patched in) and we'd love a level designer, but there's no denying that (last world aside) *OlliOlli2* is an extremely well made game that deservers to reach the widest possible audience.

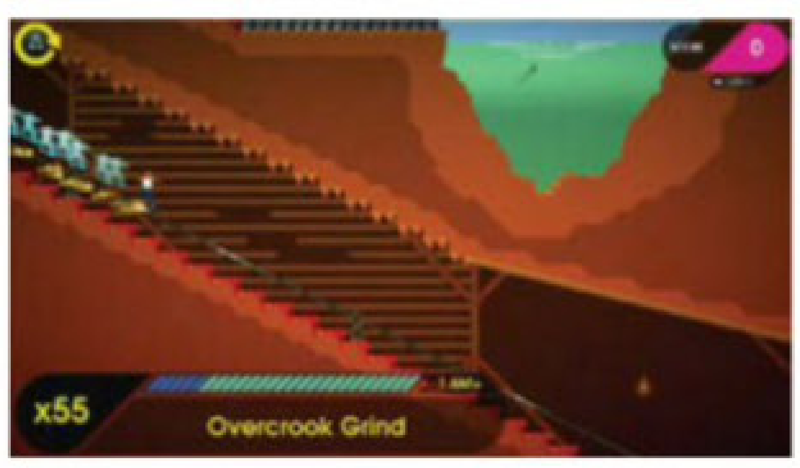
83%



»[PS4] As with the original game, each level has numerous objectives to complete, from scoring a set amount of points to grinding on robots.



»[PS4] The game's levels will see you journeying from the Wild West to an abandoned and haunted carnival.



» [PS4] Grinding continues to be extremely important, more so when you combine it with the new manual.



» [PS4] The last few stages fun to play through, but you need to master them to unlock Pro Mode.



Resident Evil: Revelations 2

» **System:** Xbox One, Xbox 360 PS4, PS3, PS Vita, PC
» **Buy it for:** £29.99
» **Buy it from:** Online and retail

Capcom's latest *Resident Evil* game is fun, but far from perfect. While the episodic nature is enjoyable, the identikit enemies, heavy borrowing from *The Last Of Us* – Barry Burton's sections are basically a duller take on Joel and Ellie's adventures – and annoying boss fights do little to suggest this is an exciting new direction for the series. There are nice touches – like using certain characters to point out hidden objects – but it all feels sloppy – while said characters can point out items of interest, either can actually see them – and poorly thought out. Thank goodness then for the excellent Raid Mode, which is a huge improvement of the one found in the original, and the main reason for *Revelation 2*'s score.

71%



Hotline Miami 2: Wrong Number

» **System:** PC (tested) Mac, PS4, PS Vita, PS3
» **Buy it for:** £11.99
» **Buy it from:** www.steampowered.com, PSN

Hotline Miami was a fantastic game that required you to intricately learn each level as you dispensed every enemy within it. Sadly, in attempting to open the scope of the original game, the developers have disappointed us with the sequel. Levels are bigger and filled with more enemies, making it fall on the wrong side of frustrating when you die. There are a large number of characters to play as now, each with their own unique skills but they often feel too restrictive to use, clashing with the sandbox approach that the original game offered. The AI is also questionable at times, too, while the story lacks the tightness and focus of the original. The music is amazing, mind.

69%



Kirby And The Rainbow Curse

» **System:** Wii U
» **Buy it for:** £49.99
» **Buy it from:** Nintendo eShop, online and retail

Kirby's new game looks incredible with stylised graphics that give it a charming look. What a pity then, that you'll rarely see them because you'll spend your time glued to your gamepad's low-res screen. While *Rainbow Curse* echoes many of the ideas found in *Kirby: Power Paintbrush*, they're not as well-realised here. Bosses can be frustrating to fight and Kirby can no longer copy the abilities of enemies. Additional players can join in and take control of characters that must protect Kirby, which does add something to the game, and there's some nice ideas (such as water mechanics) along the way but that can't help *Rainbow Curse* from ultimately feeling like a cut-down version of a 10-year-old DS game.

65%

Welcome to

Homebrew



>> Following last issue, I recently stumbled across another interesting blog; this time it's maintained by a C64 coder called Wiebo de Wit who is constructing a version of Tetris in 6502 assembly language. Posts are pretty technical and won't suit beginners, but seasoned 6502 programmers might want to look at Devdef.Blogspot.nl



» [C64] Bundle!

DOUBLE DRAGON?

The developers behind the 8-bit conversions of Laserdisc-powered Eighties release *Dragon's Lair* were always going to have a struggle on their hands. Cinematronics' title used a vast amount of data for the in-game animations, so gamers simply had to be content with their computers and consoles trying to capture some of the spirit of the game rather than recreating perfectly. But with the advent of expansion hardware for classic computers which make feats such as streaming full motion video animations from large RAM expansions and even memory cards or hard disks possible, replicating some of the true arcade experience is now more viable.

And, along with the conversion that's already being written by Jim Bagley for a ZX81 with the ZXpand interface that has previously been covered in **Retro Gamer**, another contender has entered the dungeon. This version is being written for the C64 and utilises the 16Mb RAM expansion options available to owners of the 1541 Ultimate 2 and Turbo Chameleon cartridges or through emulation. The animations employ the recently created Nuvie video format which means that each individual frame is an unexpectedly high resolution image with lots of colour.

The game uses over a CD's worth of files and there's a significant amount of media swapping during play as different 16Mb images are requested by the game but the developer has also put together a modified version of the C64 emulator, VICE, which can automatically mount any of the forty two images as the emulated program requests them.

The download of what is sort of playable but it is still considered a beta test and currently lacking in-game sound can be found behind Kikstart.eu/lair-fmv-c64 and, hopefully, this is just the first in a range of titles to properly utilise these previously software-starved expansions.

> "Replicating some of the arcade experience is now more possible"

Incoming

More exciting homebrew projects to keep your eye on, including the rather cool looking McBlagger

KIKSTART.EU/MCBLAGGER-C64



▲ Become thief, Snatch McBlagger, as he attempts a daring escape from prison in Alf Yngve's latest C64 game.

▼ Repixel8's *Brik 180* for the Atari 2600 is like *Breakout* but rotated through ninety degrees... and with two bats.



KIKSTART.EU/LOK-180-2600

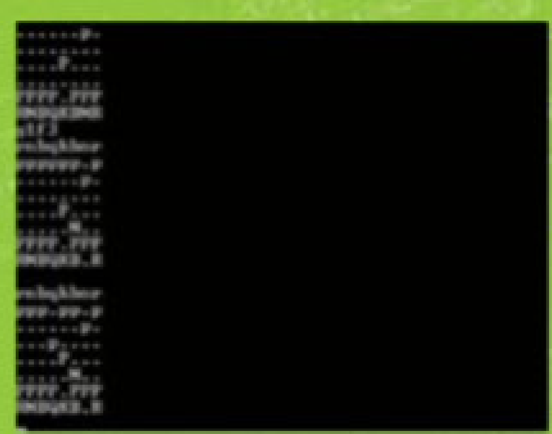
KIKSTART.EU/SCRAPES-VIC



▲ Get to the right hand side of the screen in *Kweepa's Scrap Yard Scrapes* for the unexpanded VIC 20.

A NICE GAME OF CHESS

Developed by Óscar Toledo Gutiérrez whose scrolling shoot-'em-up *Mecha 8* for the MSX we've previously looked at, *Toledo AtomChess* is one of a number of recent attempts at the record for the smallest game of *Chess* on a computer. The game is just 481 bytes in its smallest form as a self-booting floppy disk – the version which can be run from DOS or DOSbox is a longer at 512 bytes – and, whilst it doesn't play a particularly mean game, its interesting for *Chess* aficionados and programmers alike. Kikstart.eu/atomchess-dos takes you to the author's website.



» [DOS] Over the top, lads!

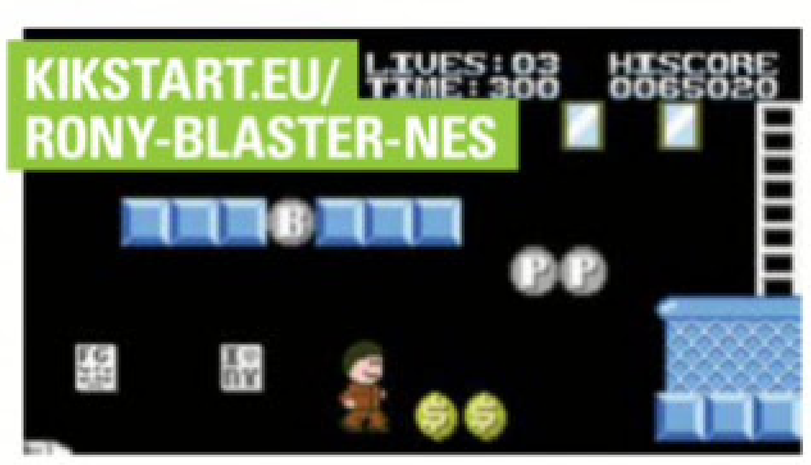


» [Megadrive] Familiar surroundings.

YOU SPIN ME ROUND

It may be early days, but Sega-16 forum member Gasega68k has recently uploaded some proof of concept code for a SNES Mode 7 style racer on the Mega drive. The preview we've tried is called *G-Zero* and is based on a certain SNES game, but the programmer has also released an version featuring part of a *Super Mario Kart* track as test data. Everything is a little chunkier than on the SNES but it moves smoothly and looks promising. Kikstart.eu/mode7-prv-md goes to the Sega-16 forum thread which has the download.

▼ *My Little Pony* has been cancelled and now only one special agent can save us from the brony backlash.



Homebrew heroes



Paul Kooistra



Harris Kladis

Harris Kladis and Paul Kooistra are the brains behind Megablasters: Escape From Castle In The Clouds on the Amstrad CPC, with Harris being one of the developers behind the original Megablasters. We had a quick chat with the duo about making things explode

Where did the idea for a *Megablasters* tribute originally come from?
Harris Kladis: Easy. It's been 20 years since Georg Odenthal and I created the original *Megablasters*. I was feeling nostalgic, wanted to make something, and a mere intro would be too little. Then I had to lure Paul into it of course.



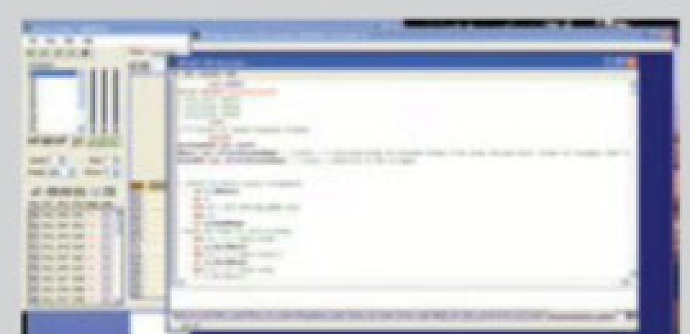
» [Amstrad CPC] What borders...?

Paul Kooistra: Harris insisted! The mock-up Harris sent looked great. Although I'd never played the original *Megablasters* in the Nineties, I know it was a game that I would have loved to have played at the time. So I wanted to help Harris out with the project but I also saw it as a chance to work on a game in a significantly different style to those I've worked on before.

How long did it take to build the new *Megablasters*?
HK: The very first files that we actually worked on are dated from July 2013.
PK: There were some long breaks during that time, though. For my part I would guess there were about 7-8 months I was actually working on it.

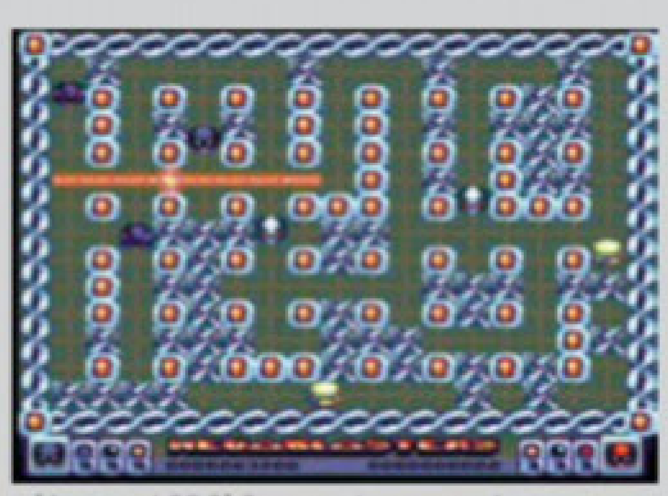
Was it difficult to match what the original game did?
PK: I didn't feel it was difficult so much, as intimidating at first. However, once the key parts of the graphics side were together and I could see it running reasonably well compared to the original, I was confident I was on the right track. The only real difficult time I had came towards the end when I started to work on it for a lot more hours each week to try and have it completed in the anniversary year.
HK: Better graphics was easy, I have gotten better over all these years. I'm personally impressed with Herve's and John's job with the sound. Overall, the task was easier in comparison. Making *Megablasters* back in 1992 meant I had to send three inch floppies and hand written letters by post from Greece to Germany.

Do you perhaps have any plans to produce a larger, extended version?
PK: The idea has been discussed, but nothing set in stone. I have some other projects I'd like to get back to, but I'll see what Harris might spring on me...
HK: Well, there are indeed quite a few ideas that we ended up putting aside because we ran out of time, so you could say there is certainly some material to start with.

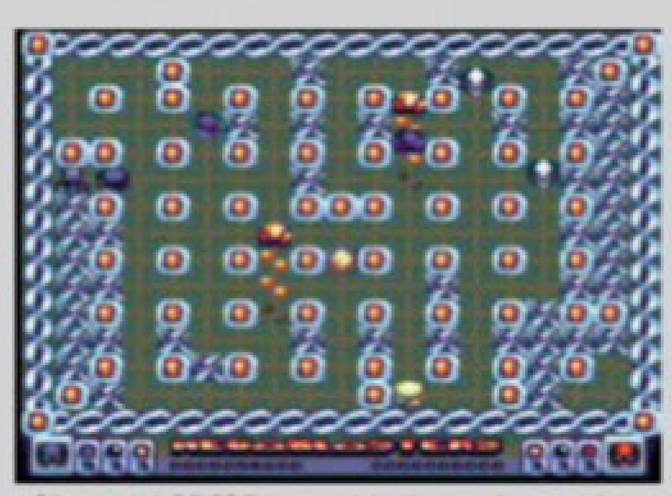


» [Amstrad CPC] Making of a Megablaster.

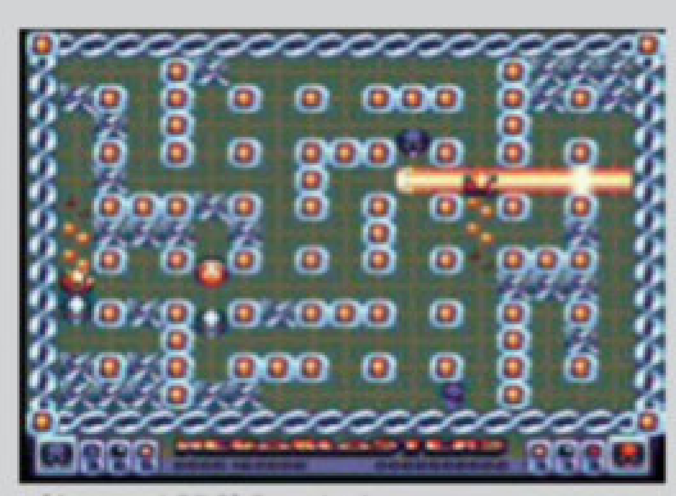
And finally, what feedback have you received from fans of the original game?
HK: I don't think there are many fans of the original game who still follow the CPC scene, but feedback has been positive. I must say that it is hardcore bomber fans that seem to like it the most. Others find it too hard.



» [Amstrad CPC] So near, but yet so far.



» [Amstrad CPC] Destroy block, get Amstrad.



» [Amstrad CPC] Surprise!

Even more Homebrew REVIEWS

CASTLEVANIA: SPECTRAL INTERLUDE

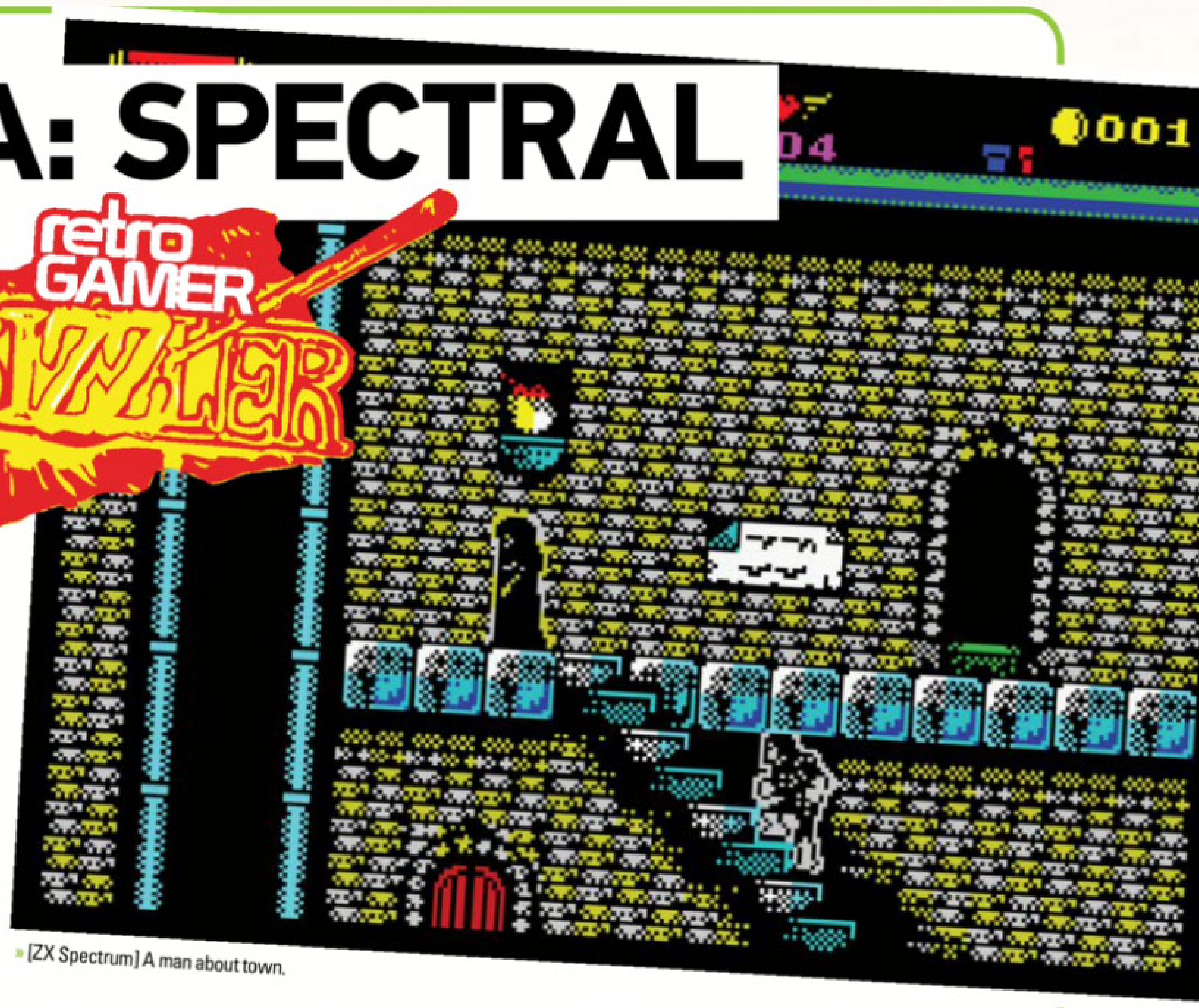
» **FORMAT:** ZX SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** REWIND
» **DOWNLOAD:** SPECTRALINTERLUDE.COM » **PRICE:** FREE

The Belmont family have fallen on hard times since there hasn't been much call for vampire hunters, and Dracula's castle isn't due to rematerialise for another fifty years. So Simon is, as the newest addition to the family, struggling to make a living in his home town of Fetra but that's all set to change when he's tasked with disposing of some skeletons roaming the local graveyard. There he meets Joseph, who wants to be killed so that his soul can occupy a magical artefact which can also store souls for aparently eternity. The side effect of Joseph's invention is that the dark energy it harnesses will also attract enemies to it, possibly even Dracula himself.

Building up the energy requires more than the souls of a few bats, though, so Belmont will need to visit what Joseph refers to as 'Points Of Power', places where the walls between realities are weak enough to lure larger monsters over that can then be defeated. Usually there would be altars at these locations, but they've been vandalised so exploration is required to find the pieces. Since Simon's trusty whip was only meant for training purposes, he'll also need to find ways to upgrade it and add other options to his arsenal, so the cash dropped by vanquished foes or whipped candles can be saved up to spend at shops in town.

Castlevania: Spectral Interlude is based on *Castlevania 2: Simon's Quest* – originally it was going to be a 'demake' – but it takes things in a different direction, grafting RPG elements into the established whip-cracking formula and a story – which is delivered through the dialogue between Belmont and other characters – that is bespoke but consistent with other games in the *Castlevania* series. This game offers a long term challenge and really takes advantage of the 128K Spectrum it requires to run, cramming over a hundred and fifty screens, some impressive graphics and very solid AY tunes in.

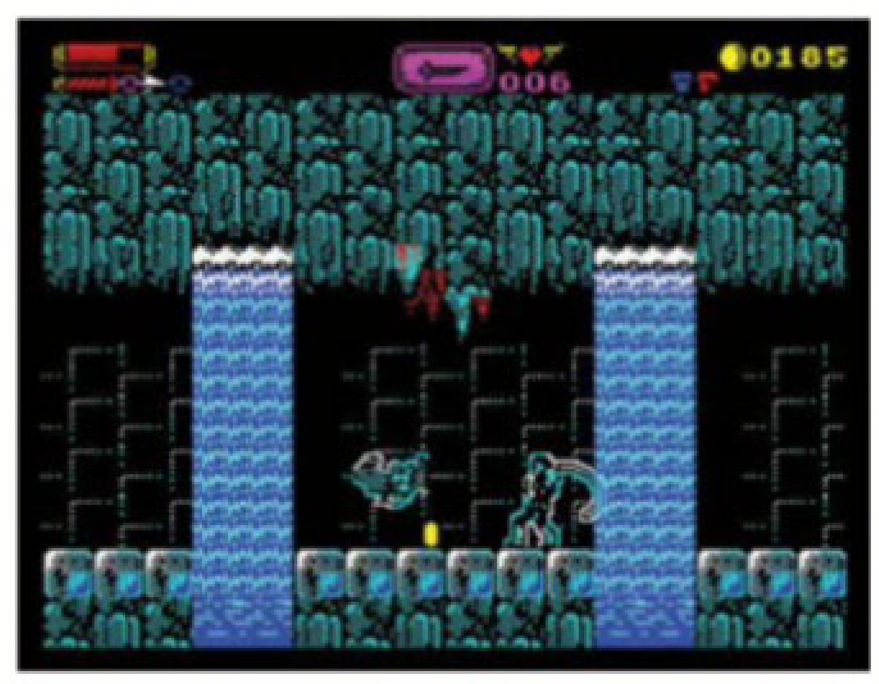
91%



» [ZX Spectrum] A man about town.



» [ZX Spectrum] The natives aren't friendly!



» [ZX Spectrum] Dangerous land, no time to delay.

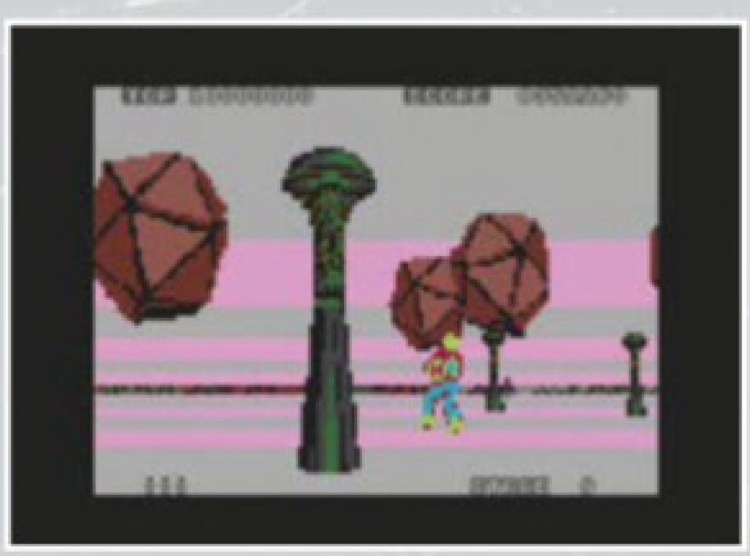
Make this

NEW

Every month our very own Jason Kelk will be teaching you handy new programming techniques. This month: hardware expansions

1 Very few homebrewers seem to use expansion hardware on the 8-bit systems. Even the stock C128 has, as an upgraded C64, not been fully explored to date but at least two player *Tetris* variant *Battle Blox* can take advantage of both the 40 and 80 column displays.

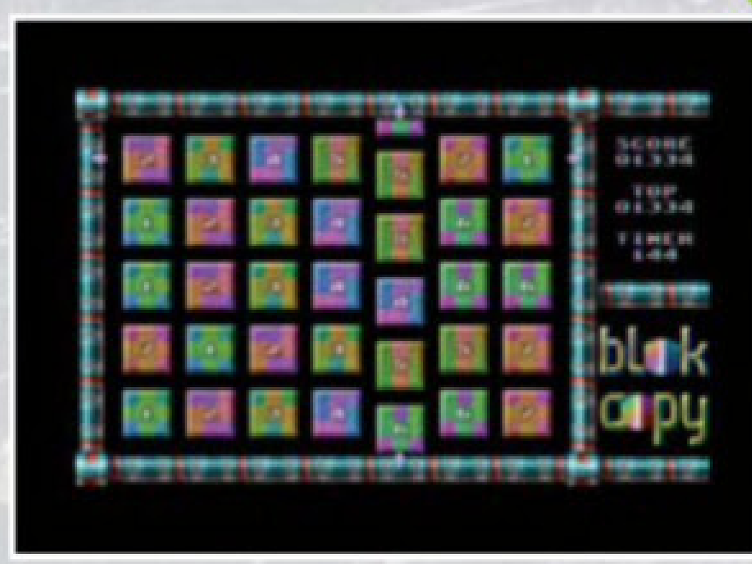




2 Recent cartridge technology like the Easyflash series for the C64 or the AtariMax make it possible to extend games far beyond the RAM available. C64 titles like *Prince Of Persia* rely on these devices to page in code or data during play.

3 For some systems there are more powerful expansions like the C64's SuperCPU which wedges a faster processor and extra RAM into the machine's cartridge port to make games like *Metal Dust* possible with its large bosses and in-game music.





4 There are always the more recent FPGA or ASIC-based remakes of 8 and 16-bit systems. The C64DTV2 runs C64 games, the hardware can do a lot more and games like *Blok Copy* that use its 256 colour graphics modes are possible.

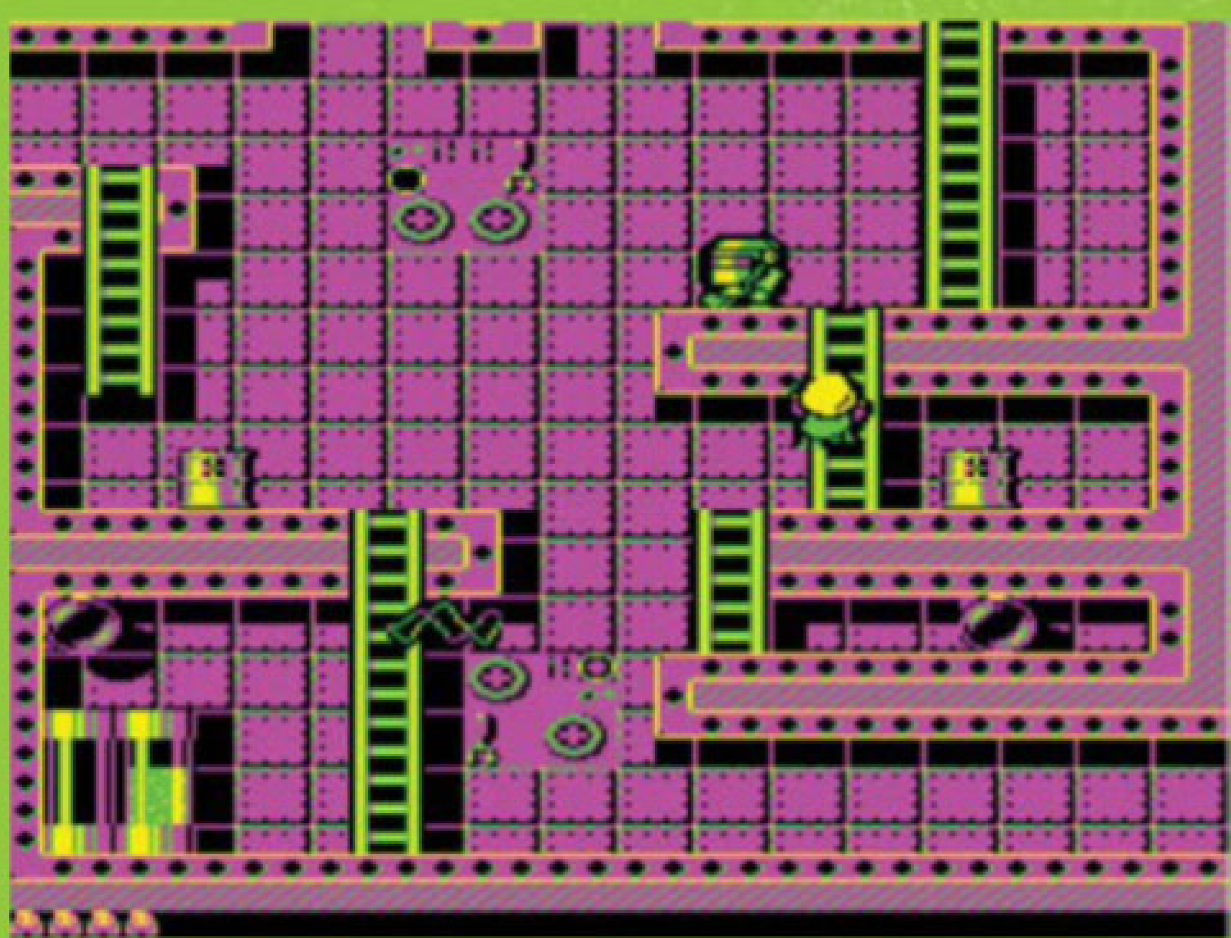
DANGEROUS RICK

» **FORMAT:** PK-01 LVIV » **DEVELOPER:** ZELYA AND DIMOUSE
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/DANGEROUS-PK01 » **PRICE:** FREE

Enter the exciting but perilous world of *Dangerous Rick*, a fedora-wearing explorer on a mission that, on the surface at least, appears strangely familiar even though it's running on an 8-bit computer that hails from what was formerly the Soviet Union. That familiarity is because the graphics have been taken from *Rick Dangerous 2* and then reduced down to four colours in order to fit within the restrictions of the hardware, but it isn't a direct port of Core Design's platformer since the code has been written from scratch and the levels were put together by the developers.

So although this is still a tough and often frustrating game, it's actually fairer on the player than the original *Rick Dangerous* titles and playable in its own right. The download comes bundled with a PK-01 emulator so getting it going should be easy even if the game itself is more challenging!

72%



» [PK-01 Lviv] Not obeying robot overlords.

UNHEART

» **FORMAT:** ATARI ST » **DEVELOPER:** MASTERS OF ELECTRIC CITY AND CHECKPOINT
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/UNHEART-ST » **PRICE:** FREE

The objective for the elf-like star of *Unheart* is to tunnel his way around each of the sixty nine levels, collecting all of the hearts before making his way to the exit. There are hazards to avoid of course with the huge metal bearings that litter each stage being the most ubiquitous, but other items include hand grenades which can be detonated by various means to destroy other obstacles or the helium-filled balloons which will push both the player and other objects skywards.



» [Atari ST] If the Bitmap Brothers did Boulder Dash.

The gameplay is inspired by Atari 8-bit classic *Boulder Dash*. Each of the levels is more a series of puzzles which usually need solving in the correct order and there's a sense of achievement when one is finally bested; there isn't a time limit so everything can be approached cautiously and deliberated over at the player's leisure, but *Unheart* is still a very challenging and enjoyable game.

84%

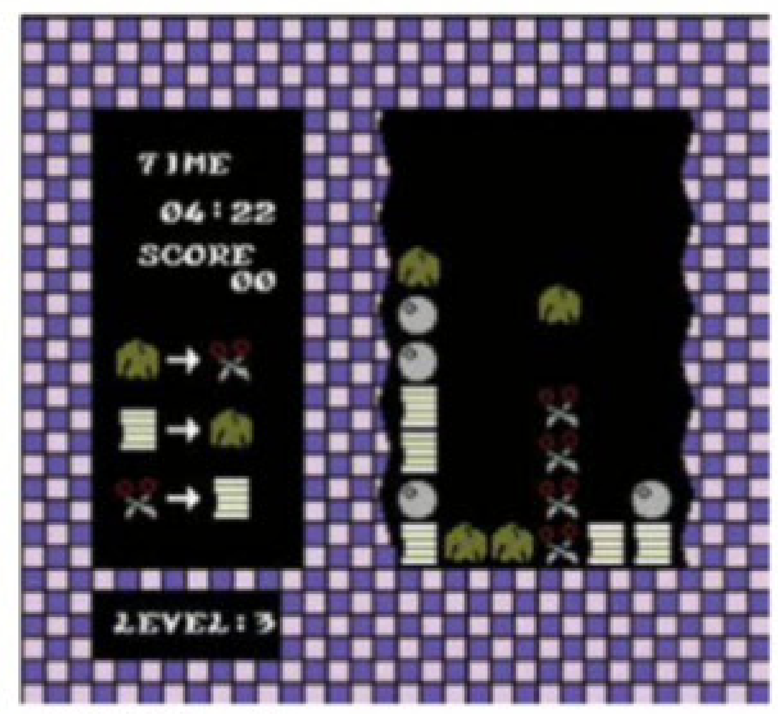
ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS

» **FORMAT:** NINTENDO NES » **DEVELOPER:** WRY GAMES » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/RPC-NES » **PRICE:** FREE

***Rock, Paper, Scissors* is an action puzzle game with four different types of falling object and rules which are similar to the children's game of the same name; scissors will cut straight through any paper they land on, paper will cover rock and the rocks in turn can blunt whole piles of scissors.**

That's all simple enough, but it's the fourth object which makes things more interesting; it's a non-descript sphere called the block which isn't directly susceptible to the other items but will mimic whatever lands above it, so plonking some paper on top, and then dropping a pair of scissors will remove both block and paper from the well. Stacking up half a dozen of something before letting the appropriate item rip through the pile is immensely satisfying, so, although the sound is somewhat disappointing, the gameplay and unusual theme make *Rock, Paper, Scissors* worth a few plays.

78%



» [NES] Let's rock it.

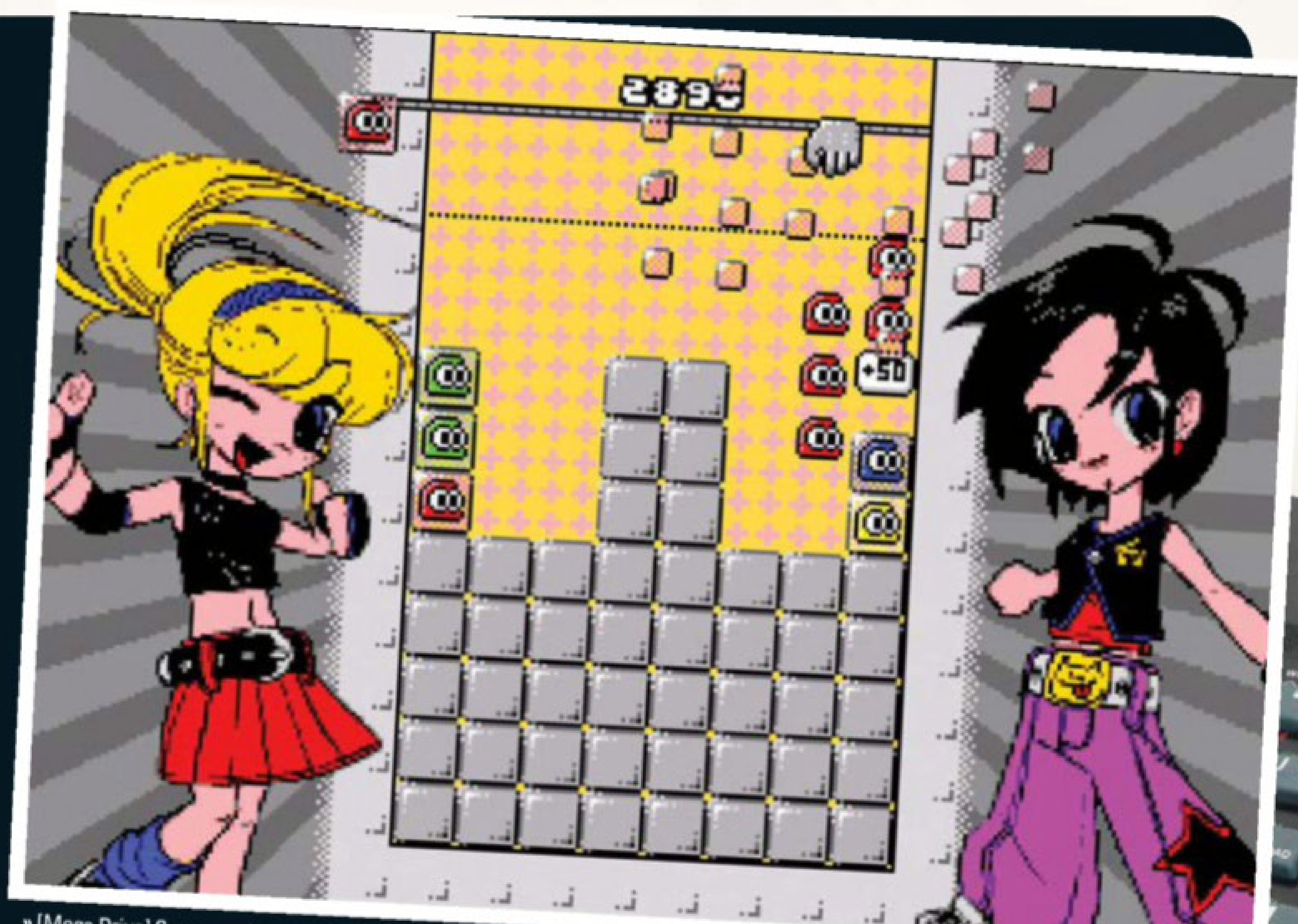
DOROPPU

» **FORMAT:** SEGA MEGA DRIVE » **DEVELOPER:** REPIXEL8
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/DOROPPU-MD » **PRICE:** FREE

Some dastardly villain has been capturing cute, brightly coloured creatures and trapping them in transparent boxes! Freeing every creature on a stage is the only way to progress this game and that's achieved by arranging the boxes into groups of three or more with the same colour. The player's hand patrols across the top of the play area and, if empty when it reaches the left hand side, it picks up a new tile which can then be dropped by pressing down on the D-pad.

Arcade-style puzzlers are quite common in homebrew circles, but *Doroppu* is nicely presented and has a solid design too. It might initially seem easy since there is only one object added at any time, but keeping everything under control soon becomes tricky and pausing to mull over moves isn't advised either since the playfield scrolls slowly upwards, ending the game if anything pushes past the dotted on-screen marker.

80%



» [Mega Drive] C-c-c-combo!

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

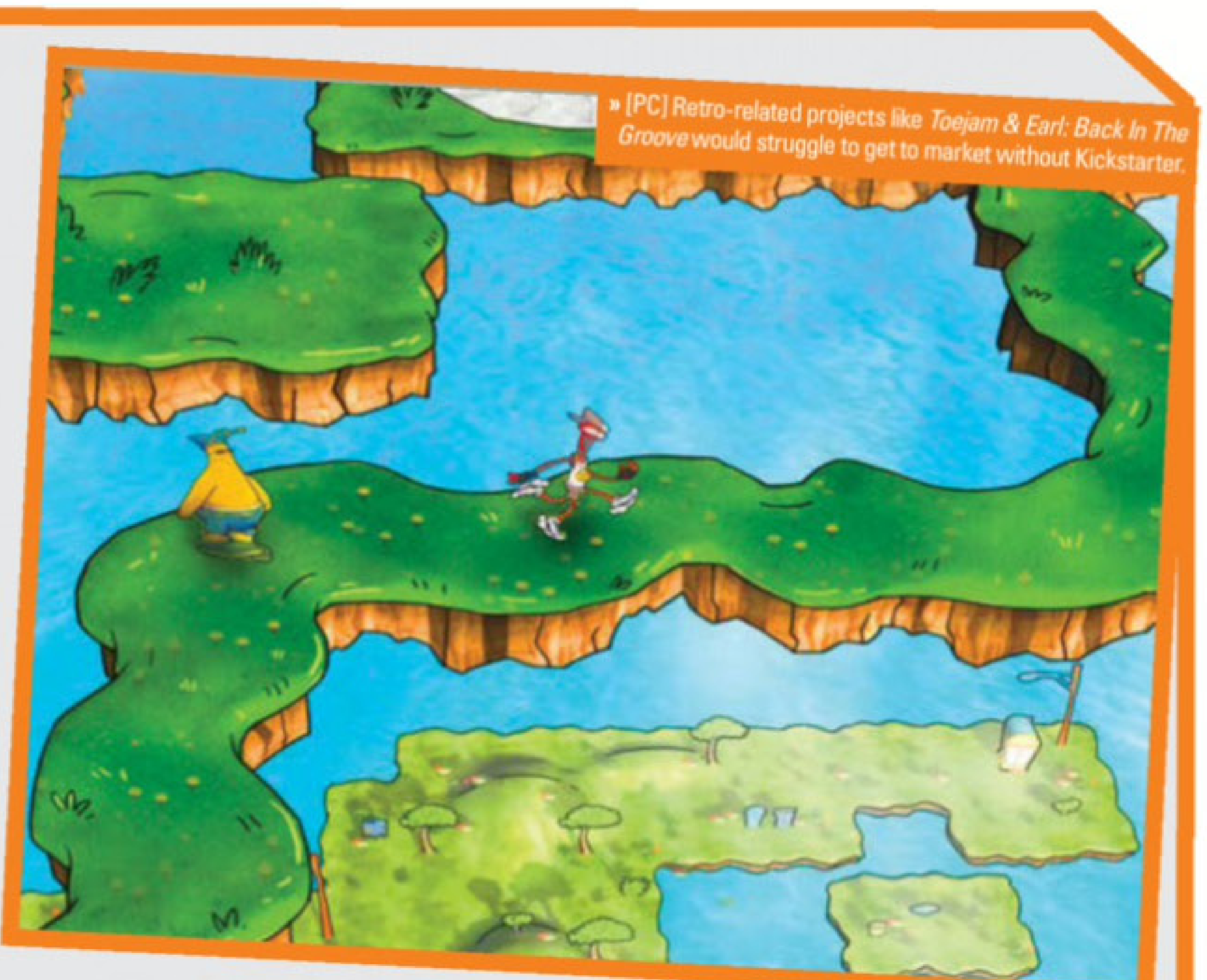
WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one



STAR LETTER

KICKING OFF



» [PC] Retro-related projects like *Toejam & Earl: Back In The Groove* would struggle to get to market without Kickstarter.

Hi **Retro Gamer,**
I don't know about you, but I'm fed up with developers resorting to Kickstarter to bring back famous old games. I can see how it's a good idea for spiritual successors like *Mighty No. 9* and *A Hat In Time* which don't have the name value to trade off of, but surely enough people have heard of the likes of *Elite* and *Toejam & Earl* that it shouldn't be necessary for those games? Those kinds of high profile projects never seem to fail, attracting so much money that it seems impossible that publishers wouldn't be interested in them. Crowdfunding could be interesting, but it just seems like a glorified pre-order system for the old guard of videogames these days.
Nigel Egerton

You've brought up an interesting point, so have a prize on us. However, while we can see the point you're making, we're not sure that we agree with you. Greg Johnson has spoken publicly about the fact that publishers weren't interested in a new *Toejam & Earl* game when it was pitched for the Nintendo DS. Additionally, it's worth remembering that a development team might consider it preferable to avoid working with a publisher – after all, Sega made major alterations to the plans for the second and third *Toejam & Earl* games.

Also, don't forget the failure of the *Dizzy Returns* Kickstarter campaign back in 2012 – for all of the success the series had in the late Eighties and early Nineties, the revival campaign didn't make even hit 10% of its £350,000 goal. It just goes to show that even the most famous old games don't necessarily retain their ability to draw in customers after a long enough absence. There are many reasons you might not want to invest in a crowdfunding campaign, but it's best not to assume that a game will happen without one.

CUBE QUERY

Hello **Retro Gamer**,
I'm wondering, has there ever been a Collector's Guide to the GameCube in any past issues? I have lots of them and have been unable to find one.
Steve Knapper

Hi Steve, we haven't covered the GameCube in the Collector's Guide series yet. There aren't any solid plans to do this at present, but with the machine's 15th anniversary approaching in 2016, we're considering the best ways to celebrate Nintendo's purple box of fun. Is there anything else GameCube-related that readers would like to see?

HITTING THE BOOKS

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I'm checking availability of The ZX Spectrum/Commodore 64 Book but it's still out of stock. Are you planning a reprint of this one? When? I would also like to buy a second copy of Amiga Book, will this be available?
Dawid

» We've not featured much GameCube content yet, but the machine is 15 years old next year.



Hi **Retro Gamer,**
I have a similar question to a reader who wrote in issue 139, asking about reprinting The Amiga Book. Do you think that the Mega Drive/SNES Book will ever receive a reprint? After only recently discovering your magazine, I've ordered and enjoyed some of the earlier RG Collection Bookazines and these have been a great read (worth the 22 Euro price for Ireland). A digital version just wouldn't carry the same quality of reading experience.

Thanks for all the great work and do you know if there will be a N64/PlayStation Book in the crosshairs for the near future? I am quite sure this would sell like a champion.
Ville Korpela

Reprints of bookazines are becoming a favourite topic amongst readers at the moment. We are examining the best possible way available to us in order to bring these popular titles back, but there are no solid updates to share with you all at the time of writing this. When we know more, you guys will be the first to know.

Right now, our focus has been on creating new books – The Amiga Book was launched a few months ago to an excellent response, and the new NES/Master System Book has just been launched.

Ville, you can rest easy knowing that the PlayStation and N64 have come up in our discussions of what to do next in terms of bookazines, and they're not the only systems we're looking at for the future.

RETRO WORLD TOUR

Hi there!
I love your magazine and have been reading it for years!

I just wanted to draw your attention to a really cool place I went to whilst I was on holiday with my wife in Krakow, Poland. While we were sightseeing I dragged her to a place called Chmiel Beer Pub – a place with a fantastic selection of beers (as the name aptly suggests) but also an amazing selection of pinball tables, including the likes of *Top Gun, Dirty Harry* and many others which could be played with by the hours, or even by the day.

The guy who owned the place seemed to really know his stuff and was in the process of creating a pinball emulator using a pinball table and screen which looked amazing…

This place got me thinking, there must be a huge number of places outside the UK and the US which are

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag



CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ

Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

» We've often looked at UK and US locations – maybe our readers could point out their favourite retro hotspots?



like this, shrines to retro games which are just waiting to be discovered. I was wondering would **Retro Gamer** be able to cover (and maybe even visit) them for future features?

Tim Donovan

We had a look at Chmiel Beer Pub online and it looks like an excellent place to go and visit! The idea of an ongoing international retro tour guide is an interesting one – we enjoy do highlighting these kinds of places for our readers, but we are also gutted that we don't get the chance to visit them as often as we would like to. Many a time, we have looked on jealously as our friends have flooded our Facebook and Twitter feeds with gorgeous pictures from places such as Super Potato in Tokyo and Arcade Street in Paris. We want to visit them all!

VERMILION CLIFFS

Dear Retro Gamer,

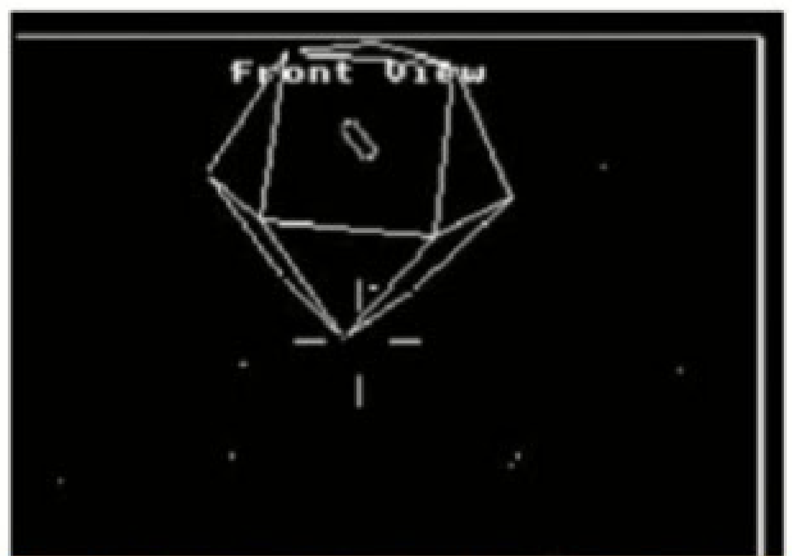
Is there any chance that you could do a feature on the game *Sword Of Vermilion* at some point? Saying that there is better RPGs out there would be an understatement, granted but it was one of the few RPGs that Mega Drive owners could actually play and it's one of the few Sega RPGs that is easy to get your hands on today. It's a game that still has charm, even today.

Lucas Busetto



» [Mega Drive] *Sword Of Vermilion* bears few of the familiar hallmarks of Sega's famed AM2 department.

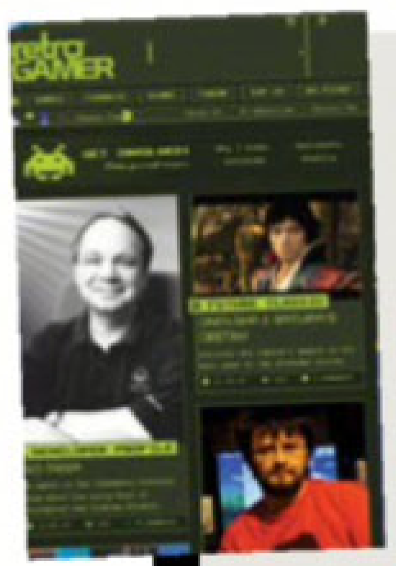
***Sword Of Vermilion* is certainly an interesting game with some very unusual design ideas. Besides being one of Sega AM2's lesser-known games, it's one which has a rather unusual legacy – the likes of *Rent-A-Hero, Jade Cocoon* and the *Shenmue* series can trace their lineage back to *Sword Of Vermilion* in some way, and maybe they would not be the games we know without it. We will take a look and see if we can give it a little recognition in a future issue.**



DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

The Greatest Games Of All Time

Your votes have come pouring in for this feature, dwarfing the response for many of our other reader polls. It's been great to see, and the preliminary results have been absolutely fascinating – we've been noticing some very interesting trends that we'll be sure to highlight when the feature is written…



From the forum

» www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

Your favourite videogame-related failure

Hiro
The first name that comes to mind is *Beyond Good And Evil*. A beautiful game with a strong and non-stereotyped female protagonist in a gorgeous fantasy world. Undeservedly resulted in becoming a commercial failure, and I'm still waiting for the sequel...

Antiriad 2097
Imagine Software, for failing in such spectacular fashion, with the bailiffs turning up while the staff were out to lunch, all recorded by a TV documentary crew. A fantastic bit of UK gaming history that couldn't have been captured better if they'd tried, and befitting of their own media hype.

TheDude18
The Amstrad GX4000. Unlike its rival the C64GS, Amstrad's console not only got rid of a keyboard but it added a little extra under the hood. Plus, it actually looked like a Snowspeeder from *The Empire Strikes Back*!

markopoloman
Rise Of The Robots. Months and months of hype, screenshots that made you believe the impossible was about to be released.... then BAM! It was shit.

kiwimike
Would the Neo Geo Pocket Color be described as a failure? Superb handheld that deserved a better fate than it got up against the mammoth Game Boy.

joefish
Game Boy Micro – not exactly a disaster, it was a fantastic bit of kit with a brilliant screen. But released nearly *one whole year after* the DS hit the market?

PostieDoc
The Commodore Plus/4, the first computer that I owned. It was poorly designed in many, many ways yet I have so many happy memories of gaming on it.

crusto
For me it has to be the Virtual Boy, by Nintendo's standards a massive failure, but I have always really liked it. It has some good exclusives, it has never given me a headache because I set it up properly, and thanks to the wonderful websites such as Planet Virtual Boy there is still a regular trickle of games and demos to try out.

samhain81
Dreamcast - A commercial failure, granted, but the Sega's last console remains my most cherished console to this day. With such a small, albeit strong software library, the Dreamcast is the only console my brothers boot up when we want some solid multiplayer gaming.

retro GAMER

Imagine Publishing Ltd
Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill,
Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Web: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
www.retrogamer.net
www.greatdigitalmags.com

Magazine team

Editor **Darran Jones**
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk
☎ 01202 586237
Editor In Chief **Ryan King**
Senior Designer **Jonathan Wells**
Staff Writer **Nick Thorpe**
Production Editor **Drew Sleep**
Photographer **James Sheppard**
Senior Art Editor **Andy Downes**
Publishing Director **Aaron Asadi**
Head of Design **Ross Andrews**

Contributors
Adam Barnes, Mike Bevan, Richard Burton, Martyn Carroll, James Churchill, David Crookes, Paul Davies, Paul Drury, Kieren Hawken, Jason Kelk, Graeme Mason, Adam Markiewicz, Damien McFerran, Rory Milne, Newton Ribeiro de Oliveira, Kym Winters

Cover Art
Driller artwork ©SteinarLund, www.steinarlund.com

Advertising
Digital or printed media packs are available on request
Head of Sales Hang Deretz
☎ 01202 586442
hang.deretz@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Account Manager Anthony Godsell
☎ 01202 586420
anthony.godsell@imagine-publishing.co.uk

International
Retro Gamer is available for licensing. Contact the International department to discuss partnership opportunities.
Head of International Licensing Cathy Blackman
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586401
licensing@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Subscriptions
For all subscription enquiries
email retrogamer@servicehelpline.co.uk
☎ (UK) 0844 848 8412
☎ (Overseas) +44 1795 592 872
13 issue subscription UK – £51.90
13 issue subscription Europe – £70
13 issue subscription ROW – £80

Circulation
Head of Circulation Darren Pearce
☎ 01202 586200

Production
Production Director Jane Hawkins
☎ 01202 586200

Founder
Group Managing Director Damian Butt

Printing & Distribution
Printed by Southernprint Ltd, 17-21 Factory Road, Upton Industrial Estate, Poole, Dorset, BH16 5SN
☎ 01202 628 300

Distributed in the UK, Eire & Rest of the World by: Marketforce, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London, SE1 0SU
☎ 0203 148 3300
www.marketforce.co.uk

Distributed in Australia by: Network Services (a division of Bauer Media Group), Level 21 Civic Tower, 66-68 Goulburn Street, Sydney, New South Wales 2000, Australia
☎ +61 2 8667 5288

ISSN 1742-3155

Console Passion

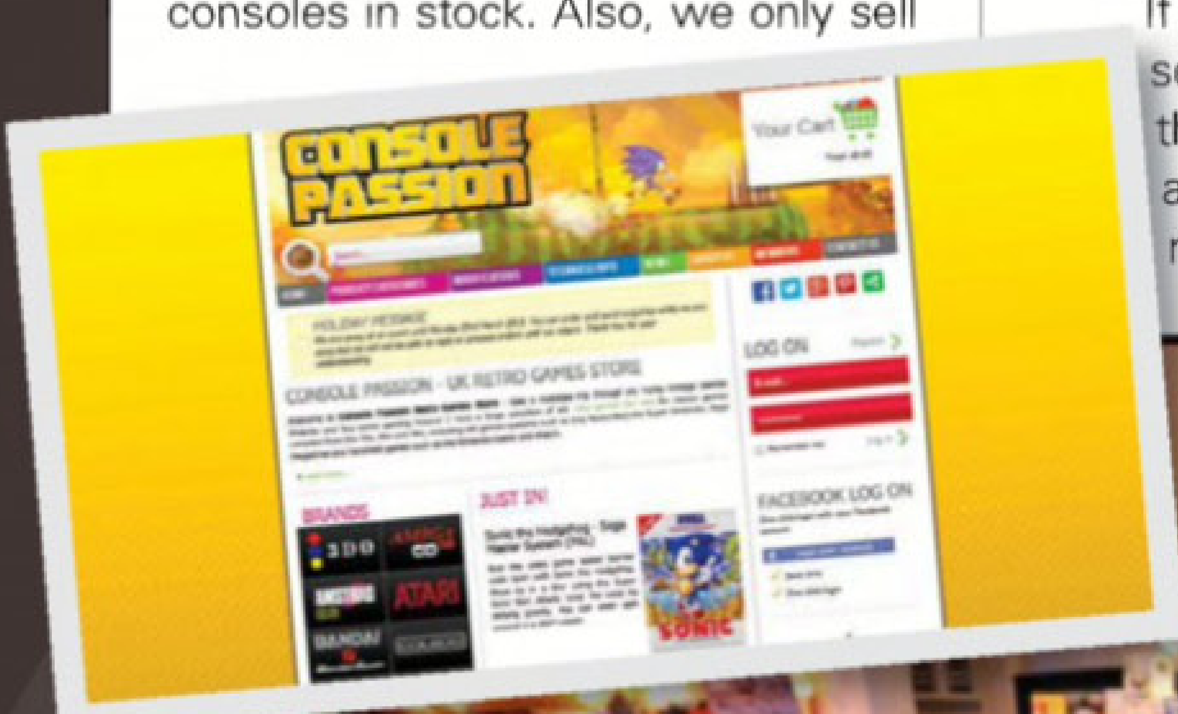
We've tracked down Andy Brown, who has one of the UK's most successful retro gaming online retailers in the form of Console Passion



» Andy (in blue) poses with the rest of the Console Passion team.

What drove you to set up Console Passion in the beginning?
I never intentionally started a business – I kind of fell into it. I began collecting in the late Nineties, and at first I started selling off my duplicates on Yahoo Auctions. When eBay really took off I started buying from car boot sales to sell stuff at a profit, and in 2001 I set up the site. I have built it up over the last 15 years and it's now a full-time business that I run alongside Replay Events.

What areas of gaming do you feel that Console Passion specialises in?
Our speciality is definitely modified consoles. We have a much larger import section than most other online retailers – currently we have over 1500 imported games and consoles in stock. Also, we only sell boxed games and try to ensure only the best quality items make it to the website. Any items that fail to meet the grade get sent to eBay!



How popular is the modding service you offer?
Very popular, but it's a blessing and a curse – I have to modify every single console myself which can be very time consuming. We're in the process of adding lots of new modifications such as PAL Nintendo 64 RGB mods, AV mods for the 8 bit consoles and a long overdue PC Engine modification service. All mods we do are legal!

Many retro businesses fail just after a few years, what the secret of your success?
If I told you it wouldn't be a secret! I think being one of the first retro games websites around meant there wasn't much competition so I



was able to establish myself quite easily. After that, I just built on my reputation and attended as many gaming expos as I could to increase my customer base.

How important is it to have a presence at game events?
For me it is important for a number of reasons; it gives customers the chance to meet us in person, which establishes a trust relationship meaning they are more likely to buy from us again. It also gives them the opportunity to see items before they buy. We also attend Comic Cons, which give us access to a completely different audience to gaming expos.

Is it possible for readers to sell/ trade you games?
Yes – we are always on the lookout for new stock and pay good money for big collections. Last year we made my biggest single purchase to date – over £10k for a huge collection, which filled a Luton Van!

Why do you think that retro gaming remains so popular in today's culture?
The simple pick-up-and-play nature makes them so appealing – just look at the raft of retro-style iOS games in the Apple store. Also, reminiscing about your childhood gaming memories at a gaming event with a few beers is definitely a great way to spend a weekend!

What is the one system that tends to sell the best?
It changes – as each new generation becomes interested in retro gaming they tend to buy the console they grew up with. When I first started the website it was 8-bit games, then it changed to 16-bit such as the SNES and Mega Drive. The PlayStation is currently our best seller with the N64 a close second. *



» Console Passion is one of the few UK online retailers that specialises in import games.



retro GAMER

»LOAD 142

next month

ON SALE 21 MAY 2015

SHOOT THE CORE!

Retro Gamer celebrates one of gaming's oldest genres by speaking to the key developers who helped mould the shoot-'em-up



Bionic Commando

■ Our next Ultimate Guide looks at Capcom's enjoyable and iconic platformer and compares the best and worst conversions

Multiplayer Games

■ **Retro Gamer** reveals your favourite games to play with friends. What will take your number one spot?

Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap

■ Ryuichi Nishizawa explains how he created one of the Master System's greatest adventures

And much more, including…

Loricels • Black Widow • Texas Instrument T199 • Side Pocket • Spy vs. Spy • Andrew Hewson • Twisted Metal • Laser Squad


retro gaming cables.co.uk
Quality audio video cables made in Great Britain
RGB SCART Cables available for:
• Sega Mega Drive 1 & 2
• Nintendo SNES (PAL & NTSC)
• SNK Neo Geo AES & CD/CDZ
• BBC Acorn Micro
• Sinclair ZX Spectrum + 128k, +2 & QL
• Atari STF, STE & STFM
• Amstrad CPC 464
• Various Arcade Jamma Superguns (Sigma, Pana, CMVS etc)
Plus many more on our website
RGB SCART cable key features:
• Vast improvement over traditional RF, composite video and s-video
• Pixel clear RGB video
• Improved sound quality
• No more tuning
• SCART TV plug & Play
• Compatible with up-scaling units i.e. Framemeister Mini XRGB
Buy direct from www.retrogamingcables.co.uk/store
FREE UK Delivery


To advertise in
retro GAMER
Contact us on
01202 586442
adinfo@imagine-publishing.co.uk


MUTANT CATERPILLAR GAMES
... SINCLAIR ... COMMODORE ... ACORN ...
MACHINES
REPAIRS
10% OFF your first order when you use discount code "retrogc1"
HARDWARE
SOFTWARE
ALL OUR STOCK IS TESTED, WORKING AND GUARANTEED
FREE UK inland postage - excellent international postage rates
www: www.mutant-caterpillar.co.uk
ebay: mutant-caterpillar
email: sales@mutant-caterpillar.co.uk
tel: 01970 625441
... AMSTRAD ... ATARI ... ANYTHING ELSE!


CONSOLE PASSION
WWW.CONSOLEPASSION.CO.UK
SERVING THE RETRO GAMING COMMUNITY FOR MORE THAN 15 YEARS
ONLINE ORDERING AND WORLDWIDE SHIPPING OF THOUSANDS OF GAMES AND CONSOLES.
MOST GAMES AND CONSOLES ARE COMPLETE WITH THEIR ORIGINAL BOXES AND INSTRUCTIONS.
GAMES COLLECTIONS AND CONSOLES BOUGHT OR PART EXCHANGED.
MANY RARE JAPANESE GAMES STOCKED.
THE UK'S PREMIER MODIFIED CONSOLE SUPPLIER.
PayPal
realex
Verified by GeoTrust
Maestro VISA MasterCard VISA
Find us on Facebook and Twitter


CHILLOUT GAMES
we value your games
www.chilloutgames.co.uk/SellGames.aspx
review centre
since 1st 2005
We Pay:
£144.33
£53.95
£13.47
£36.34
£15.56
£63.73
-RAPID PAYMENT
-GREAT PRICES
-FREE COURIER
WANTED
SECOND HAND
win prizes
facebook
Prices valid as at 23rd April 2015. Prices subject to change on a daily basis. Chillout Games and retro-games.co.uk are trading names of Chillout Games Ltd. Prices are for shop credit - 12% more than PayPal. T&Cs at www.chilloutgames.co.uk.

ENDGAME



MR DRILLER 2

» Following the Dreamcast and PlayStation versions of his first arcade adventure, Mr Driller returned in a sequel – but this time, it was PC and GBA owners who got their hands on home conversions. The undergrounders have overrun the world again, and it's Susumu Hori's job to stop them. Let's catch up as he discovers the source of the problem…



01

» The king of the undergrounders is having a lovely vacation in Egypt. We'd thought that the scenery wouldn't change much when you're 2,500 metres below the surface, but apparently it does as the monarch is pleased with the change.



02

» Suddenly, Susumu bursts in to inform the king that his block production is out of control. Many people are upset with the influx of blocks from underground, as their views of brutalist bus stations have been completely spoiled.



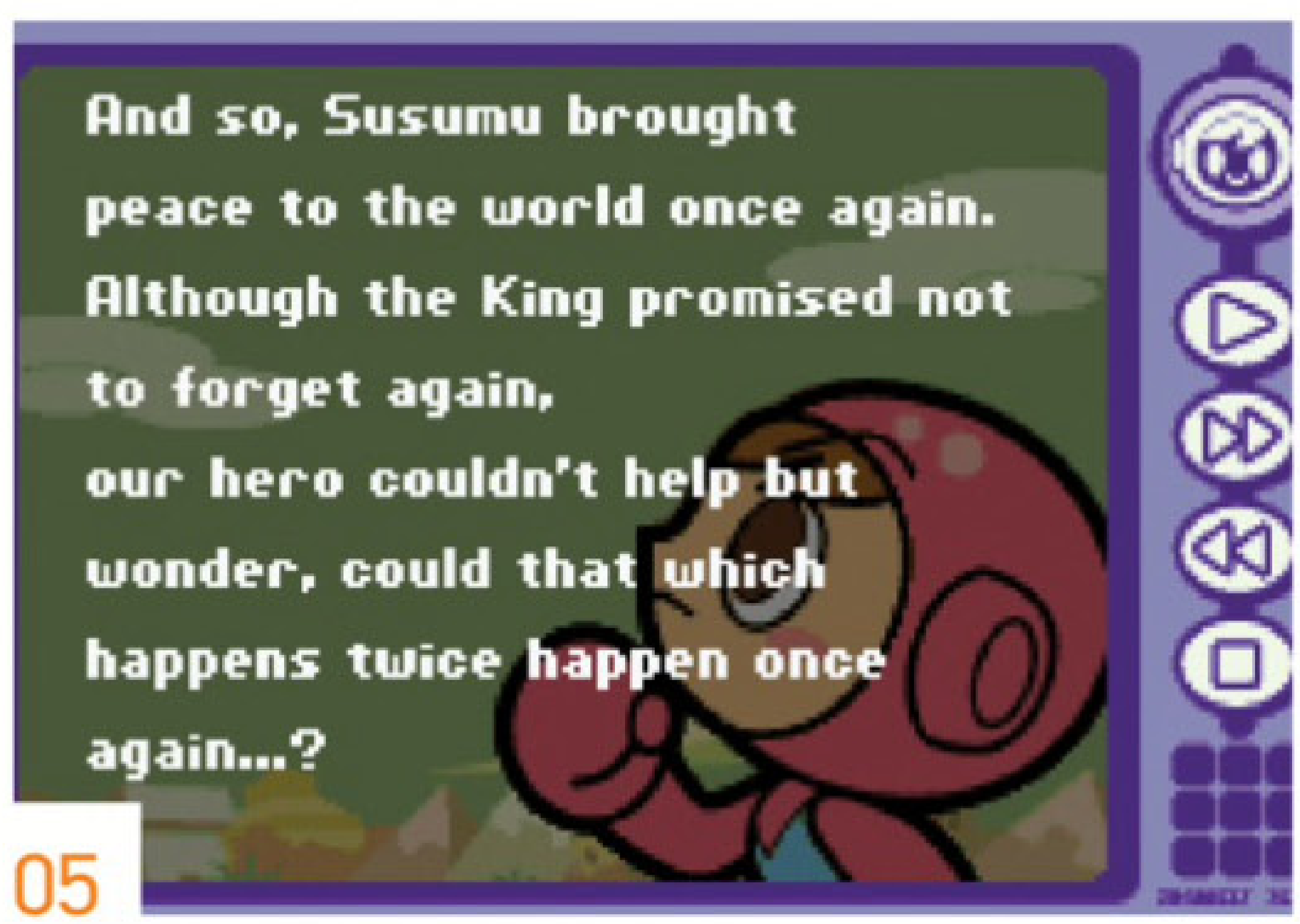
03

» Susumu is angry – after all, if he'd wanted to look at *colourful* blocky things, he'd have just painted the University Of Essex campus in Colchester. The concrete aficionado even calls the king's capability to rule into question. How rude!




04

» Apologetically, the king immediately orders the halting of block production. While this might seem a tad hasty, you have to bear in mind the family history – especially the Dig Dug massacre of 1982, when Susumu's dad, Taizo, went underground and killed countless creatures by inflating them until they exploded.



05

» Having successfully coerced a king into an industrial shutdown, Susumu is satisfied. But he must remain vigilant, lest someone else's economic activities once more spoil his view of the world's tower blocks. Of course, as far as Susumu is concerned, he's doing the world a service. What a selfish guy.


WORLD OF TANKS
ROLL OUT
Attack, defence or support?
Choose your tank from among 300 war machines
and fight in the worldwide arena
BOOOM
7
www.pegi.info
JOIN THE COMMUNITY OF THIS GAMING PHENOMENON
PLAY FOR FREE AT WORLDOFTANKS.EU
WARGAMING.NET
LET'S BATTLE
© 2015 Wargaming.net. All rights reserved.